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"TELL ME, MY DARLING, THAT IT IS SO; THAT MY HEART HAS NOT DECEIVED ME," SAID MR. POWER, HARNESTLY.

## AN ENDURING LOVE.

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### CHAPTER I.

Is this "Merrie England" of ours there are few prettier or more picturesque spots than the quaint old-fashioned market town of Stapleville, almost lost to view amongst the beautiful Surrey hills.

The railway touches it not; the hurry and bustle of the outside world do not invade its precincts; everything breathes a spirit of old-world peacefulness and prosperity.

The houses are substantially built, the shops large and commodious; while almost all the people one meets have a well-to-do air which speaks eloquently of ease and plenty.

On either side of the main street flows a stream of limpid water, so clear and transparent, so refreshingly cool that the casual wayfarer, parched by the hot sun, is tempted to stoop and drink.

A little removed from the principal thorough-

fare the ground is dotted with real old-fashioned houses, the architecture of which carries your mind back to the previous century.

Rambling and not altogether artistic, perhaps, to our modern sense, some of these old dwellings seem, but roomy and comfortable, and each is surrounded by walled gardens and orchards, while at the rear lie extensive fields of meadow and pasture-land.

Nearest the town is situated Elleralie, the property of Dr. Marriot, who lives there with a maiden sister and his only child, Ada.

Fortunately for him his private means place him beyond the need of an extensive practice, for Stapleville is remarkably healthy, and it is not often its inhabitants have occasion to employ his skill.

If it were not for his sister, Heeba, he sometimes laughingly asserts, his knowledge of the healing art would become a thing of the past.

While Heeba Marriot lives, however, her brother will never be without a patient. She is one of those frail delicate women with finely-strung nerves, whose lives are passed in a state of chronic invalidism.

Sometimes she does not leave her room for

days together, at others she crawls down into the drawing-room, where, carefully wrapped in shawls, she alternates between an easy chair and a luxurious couch.

On this particular morning she has, to the unbounded amazement of the other two, actually put in an appearance at the breakfast-table, a feat nearly unprecedented.

They have just concluded their meal, and Mr. Marriot is standing at the window gazing into the garden, all ablaze with flowers.

"Heeba," he says, gently, but without turning his head, "could you not manage to take a turn in the garden? It is a glorious morning, and there is scarcely a breath of wind stirring. Or let me take you for a quiet drive."

The lady raises her head, languidly.

"How absurd you are, James!" she replies, and there is a querulous ring in her voice; "do you suppose I am likely to venture out with the certainty of catching a fresh cold?"

The doctor sighs wearily; he has been over the same ground so many times, and always with the one result.

Still he makes another effort, though from the first he knows his task is hopeless.

His sister interrupts him pettishly. "The discussion fatigues me," she says, "and wastes your time. Are you not going out?" "Yes; it is a pity to remain indoors on such a morning as this."

Then he turns to his daughter and asks, with a smile,—

"What are your plans, Ada?"

The girl does not answer for a moment, and then replies, slowly,—

"If I can be of any use to Aunt Hester I shall remain at home."

"Nonsense, girl!" the invalid breaks in. "How can you do any good? I daresay you have made some arrangements with your friends at the Hall!"

"That does not matter in the least; I can easily send an apology, if you would like me to stay."

But Miss Marriot has no such wish; and, having announced the fact plainly, she makes her exit.

"Early rising, I fear, does not suit your aunt's peculiar complaint," Mr. Marriot remarks, and Ada laughs merrily.

"Poor auntie!" she says, presently, "life must be very dreary for her. I do wish she could rouse herself from this torpid state."

"It is far too late, child," he answers, gravely, and then, kissing her, he adds, "I hope you will have a pleasant morning. Are we to expect you at luncheon?"

"I think not. Isabel has asked me to stay at the Hall."

She gazes at him with fond pride, as he crosses the garden on his way to the stables.

He is a tall fair man with a lofty brow, regularly-cut features and deep brown eyes that have a very lovable expression in them.

For a little longer she stands gazing dreamily into the garden, and then with a half sigh goes to her room to dress.

Meanwhile at the Hall breakfast was still in progress, for with the exception of the head of the family, the inmates were not partial to early rising.

When they all sat down together they formed a somewhat numerous, and, according to Mr. Moore's assertion, noisy party; but on the present occasion the only occupants of the room were Mrs. Moore, her daughter Isabel, known familiarly as Belle, and the latter's cousin, Albert Pottinger, a young man who had recently taken to spending a large portion of his time at Stapleville.

Isabel was a merry light-hearted girl, with dark hair and eyes, and with a bright good-humoured smile perpetually hovering over her face.

It was not difficult to trace a resemblance between the cousins. Like Isabel, the young man had dark hair and eyes, and irregular but pleasing features.

He could not in strict justice be called handsome, and yet there was something peculiarly attractive in his frank open features.

Between Isabel and himself there existed a staunch friendship of many years' standing. The two were firm allies, though oftentimes the girl taking advantage of her sex, plagued him considerably.

"I believe you are very busy this morning, are you not?" she said to him with a little mischievous smile, as her mother rose from the table.

"Yes!" he answered dolorously, "I have a heap of correspondence to get through. Why?"

"Oh!" she said demurely, "it does not matter. Fortunately I shall not be left entirely to my own devices."

"I am glad to hear that," carelessly, "because I shall be chained to the desk for the next two hours."

"Ah!" still with an air of quiet humour, "it is exceedingly unfortunate, but no doubt Ada and I can manage to amuse ourselves until then."

He had crossed the room and stood holding the handle of the door.

At this little speech he turned round.

"Are you expecting Miss Marriot this morning?" he asked.

"Yes! Do you know I rather regret you are so busy. It is a beautiful morning, and I thought we might have gone as far as the Nest before luncheon. Still, of course, one must attend to business."

"Yes!" he declared, with an air of decision, "one cannot neglect that. But," meditatively, "upon second thoughts, I believe I can accomplish all that is really essential, after lunch."

Then they looked at each other and burst into a peal of merry laughter.

"Albert, you are a hypocrite!" the girl declared, when their merriment had subsided.

"Well, under the circumstances, I presume it would be useless to dispute the accusation," he replied; "but still something might be urged in excuse. For instance—"

"For instance," Isabel interrupted, "Ada herself. Here she is coming up the drive, and really if anything can excuse your conduct I freely admit it is Ada's beauty."

They hastened into the hall and met her at the top of the steps.

Truly she formed a pretty picture, this dainty maiden, and small wonder was it that Albert Pottinger's heart beat fast and that his pulses throbbed more quickly as he gazed upon her.

She was tall and rather slightly built, but with a graceful carriage, and of admirable proportions.

She had a fair complexion and long tresses of wavy brown hair. Her eyes too were brown, looking out soft and clear from beneath long silken lashes. The nose was straight and finely cut, the mouth small and well-shaped, while on each cheek was a dainty blush-rose tint.

She kissed Isabel, and held out her hand to the young man with a charming smile.

"You are very lazy, you two," she said. "I wonder Mr. Moore does not scold you. Really I believe you have but just breakfasted."

"You are an advocate for early rising," exclaimed the young man eagerly, "and so am I. To me it seems that the beauty of the day lies in the fresh morning hours, when the dew-drops sparkle like diamonds on the verdant meadow, and—"

"My cousin is writing a novel," interrupted Isabel, laughing; "I think he must be reciting from one of the chapters. Albert, I am ashamed of your hypocrisy. Believe me, Ada, he is always the last to enter the breakfast-room. Let me see, I think you said it was impossible for you to accompany us to the Nest!"

He looked at her reproachfully.

"That word finds no place in my vocabulary where Miss Marriot and yourself are concerned," he said gallantly; "I am entirely at your service."

"But what of those horrid letters which must be answered without delay?"

"They can wait till opportunity offers," he said.

"Perhaps Mr. Pottinger intends to take advantage of the fresh morning hours, when the dew-drops, etc.," Ada interposed mischievously.

"I thank you, Miss Marriot," he said, without a blush. "You have divined my intentions most accurately. But may I suggest that we are wasting time? Believe, if you will kindly go and dress I will endeavour to interest Miss Marriot while we wait."

"He means to recite another paragraph from the forthcoming novel," laughed his cousin; "do not permit him to bore you."

"Are you really engaged in writing a book?" asked the girl, when Isabel had taken her departure.

"An invention pure and simple of the enemy, Miss Marriot," he answered. "My cousin is a very nice girl, but, as you are aware, given to banter. At present she imagines I am in her power, and that I fear she will expose me."

"You alarm me," his companion said; "of what have you been guilty?"

"I have usurped a woman's privilege, and changed my mind. At breakfast I announced my intention of devoting the morning to work; now, with your permission, I intend to accompany you to the Nest."

"We at least ought to be thankful for the change," she remarked, "since we gain the attendance of a cavalier."

"You are very kind," he said. "Ah! here is Belle! I have just been telling Miss Marriot that I had intended giving up this morning to work."

"And did you explain the reason for your change of purpose?"

"Well, no!" he said, deliberately; "though I probably should have done so had not your entrance prevented me."

Just as they were leaving the room Mrs. Moore put in an appearance to give them various directions and warnings, all of which Isabel merrily declared would be forgotten directly the park gates closed behind them.

They formed a happy trio—those three, and sauntered along in the highest spirits.

In the future days Ada Marriot often thought of that morning's ramble. Nature was at her best. Overhead the sun shone brightly from a sky of brilliant blue, while the heat of its rays was tempered by a warm west wind which sprang up with the progress of the day. On the previous day a gentle rain had fallen, and the grass was still fresh and green. In the leafy hedges the beautiful wild flowers peeped out smilingly from their verdant frames, and innumerable feathered songsters carolled forth peans of praise to Heaven.

And she herself, in the flush of youth and strength and beauty, with not a single care to mar her happiness, laughed and jested, as only those in the sunshine of youth can.

The Nest, to which they were directing their steps, was a beautiful and picturesque spot, crowning the summit of a wooded hill.

From the top one could look around for miles in all directions on the peaceful and smiling landscape beneath.

"It makes a lovely picture, does it not?" exclaimed Ada, enthusiastically, as they gained the height. "I often wonder if the folks who spend their time rushing hither and thither across the Continent ever realise what charming bits of scenery lie almost at their own doors."

"I can safely affirm I have never seen anything so lovely as this," exclaimed the young man warmly; but then, as his cousin afterwards remarked, Ada had not been the companion of his foreign travels.

"I am sorry to break in upon your rhapsodies," she said; "but I have an idea, a genuine inspiration. Let us organise a picnic, it would be delicious, lunching under the shade of these beautiful trees."

"What horrible desecration!" responded her cousin, with mock indignation. "Fancy this beautiful spot made hideous by the odds and ends left behind by a picnic party! People who indulge in such things have no soul for the artistic."

"Still it would be very pleasant," interposed Ada mildly, "and we need not do much damage."

Isabel laughed gaily as her cousin unblushingly shifted his ground.

"Well," he said, "of course, if we have the right kind of people it would be different. You and Belle and myself for instance, we three should make a famous picnic party."

"Thank you, *mon cher cousin*," cried Isabel, "but I fear I should not benefit greatly by that arrangement. No, we will do the thing on a grand scale. Harry will be home in a few days, and, by the way, Ada, that reminds me we are expecting a visitor. You have heard me speak of Mr. Power? he is coming down with my brother."

"Power coming here," said Albert, gloomily. "I understood he was going abroad."

"He supplies a further proof that it is not alone we poor women who change our minds. But how miserable you look! I thought you and Mr. Power were quite old friends, a sort of modern David and Jonathan business."

"So we are; he is a capital fellow, full of fun and frolic. I am much attached to him."

Isabel did not reply; but she thought her cousin's face ill reflected his feelings.

The shadow of annoyance soon passed, and the return journey to the Hall was occupied in discussing the arrangements for the forthcoming picnic.

At luncheon Isabel asked her father on what day Harry would arrive.

"On Monday," he replied, as she asked him.

"Then we will fix the date for Wednesday," she said; and after the meal she carried Ada off to make out a list of people to be invited.



Her cousin strongly urged his right to accompany them, but Isabel was inexorable.

"I fear we have already trespassed too much on your valuable time," she said calmly; "it would be selfish to encroach still further," and he was forced reluctantly to retire.

Left to themselves the girls turned their attention to the task before them, and it was not until after five o'clock tea that Ada was ready to return to Ellensie.

"Well, child," exclaimed her father, as she entered the drawing-room, "have you spent a pleasant day?"

"Yes, indeed," she answered, "it has been most enjoyable. But where is Aunt Heba?"

"Her head is aching again, so we shall have the evening to ourselves, and after dinner you shall give me a little music. Now, run away and change your dress."

## CHAPTER II.

It was Monday evening, and the family at the Hall were waiting for the expected guests.

"The train was due at six o'clock," said Mr. Moore, looking at his watch, "and the mare ought to bring them in half-an-hour; we shall see them in a few moments."

"Listen!" exclaimed Isabel. "I hear the sound of wheels on the carriage-drive," and in a short time the young man entered the hall.

Harry Moore was a pleasant-faced, ruddy complexioned young fellow, about four years Isabel's senior.

He kissed his mother and sister without undue demonstration, gave his father a hearty hand-clasp, and turned to introduce his friend.

"This is Mr. Power, of whom I have written," he said; "he is an old chum of Albert's. Frank, my mother and sister, and my father."

They gave him a hearty greeting, chiefly, perhaps, because he was Harry's friend, but partly, too, on his own account.

Frank Power was without doubt a strikingly handsome man. He was tall and well-built. His complexion was fair; his features almost perfect. His curly hair, which he wore rather long, was auburn in colour, and his upper lip was covered with a heavy, yellowish moustache. He had deep-blue eyes, which sparkled with unusual brilliancy, and when he laughed, which was not rarely, one caught sight of two rows of white even teeth.

His voice, too, was singularly low and musical, and he possessed a charming manner, which won for him a host of friends.

"What a handsome man!" exclaimed Mrs. Moore to her husband, shortly before going down to dinner, "and how extremely agreeable he is."

"Yes!" assented Mr. Moore, "he has a very taking manner; but I should fancy he lacks staying-power. Not exactly the sort of man one would care to lean upon in a moment of danger."

"The girls will find no fault in him!"

"No! perhaps not! Still I am rather thankful Belle's affections are already bestowed."

Mr. Moore was rather prejudiced against what he somewhat contemptuously called "pretty" men, but even he found it difficult to struggle successfully against his young guest's persuasive charms.

Frank Power was indeed one of those people whose mission in life seems to be praised and fêted and caressed.

Insensibly and without ulterior design he wormed himself into the affections and good graces of those around him.

Everyone spoke well of him. He possessed no enemies; he was indeed, as the ancient writer so aptly phrased it, "all things to all men."

Not that he deliberately endeavoured to curry favour for the furtherance of his own ends, but he was so constituted that his nature abhorred strife of every kind.

His very temperament compelled him to be friendly with those with whom he came in contact, to look only upon the sunny side of life, and to banish all things which tended to mar the ease and pleasure of his existence.

He possessed, too, a natural adaptability, which enabled him to suit himself to his com-

pany, and thus it happened that his society was equally welcome to all classes.

This first evening at Stapleville Hall afforded a conspicuous example of his versatile gifts.

With Isabel he discussed society; he listened pleasantly to his host's stories of field sports, offering occasionally an intelligent and well-timed comment, while he even contrived to impress Mrs. Moore with the idea that his knowledge of household matters was by no means slight.

Before the conclusion of dinner he was on friendly terms with each member of the family, and when later in the evening it was discovered that he was a skilled musician his popularity was firmly established.

Isabel and her mother were passionately fond of singing, and Frank, who had a beautifully clear tenor voice, seated himself at the piano, and played and sang song after song.

"Your friend is decidedly an acquisition," the girl said to her cousin as she bade him good-night, "his acquaintance is worth cultivating."

"Do not lose your heart to him," Albert whispered banteringly; "remember at the first sign of danger I shall write off to Ronald."

Isabel laughed. "Have no fear," she said. "I should as little dream of comparing him with Ronald as with you. Still, he is really an exceedingly agreeable companion. Is he rich?"

Albert shrugged his shoulders. "I cannot say. He is an only child, and his father is popularly supposed to possess a handsome competency."

"Does the young man do anything?" "Dabbles in literature, I believe; but not to any great extent."

"Ah! well, good-night. Do not forget our picnic on Wednesday; Miss Marriot is coming, you know," and with this parting shaft she tripped away.

The young man followed his host gloomily into the billiard-room, where Frank and Harry were engaged in a friendly game.

His thoughts were far from pleasant. He was feeling depressed, and he did not endeavour to disguise from himself the fact that his low spirits were caused by Frank Power's advent at Stapleville Hall.

He looked across at him now—young, handsome, and debonaire, and instinctively his imagination conjured up a vision of Ada.

"I wish Master Frank had stuck to his original intention and gone abroad," he muttered savagely; "but after all that sentiment is rather childish and decidedly uncivil."

Banishing the gloom from his face he crossed the room and entered into conversation with his uncle; but though he appeared at ease his heart was still heavy, and he could not altogether oust the feeling of depression which had taken possession of him.

Ada did not visit the Hall the next day; but on the Wednesday morning she came over to assist Isabel in putting the finishing touches to the arrangements for the proposed excursion.

Albert was the first to notice her arrival. "Good-morning, Miss Marriot," he exclaimed joyously, "your presence will infuse new vigour into our labours."

"Another compliment for poor me," cried Isabel, with a laugh, "you are growing dexterous, Albert, in the use of speech."

Then turning to her friend, she said,—"Ada, allow me to introduce Mr. Power."

Ada glanced up, and her cheeks mantled with a conscious blush.

"I trust you will not prove so stern a task-master, or rather mistress as Miss Moore," the young man said gaily, "for more than an hour we have been labouring like galley-slaves."

"That is the chief beauty of a picnic," observed Harry Moore, who had just sauntered up; "fancy taking the trouble of conveying your provisions several miles when you could consume them much more comfortably at home."

"I will treasure up that sentiment, Harry," remarked his sister, "and publish it for Beattie Maydew's benefit," an announcement which evoked a general smile at the young man's expense.

Presently the other guests began to arrive and amidst much merriment and joyous hilarity the hamper was safely stowed in the vehicles, and the happy cavalcade set out.

With his usual good luck Frank Power found himself *vis-à-vis* with Ada, Albert having been coolly appropriated by Clara Barclay, a dashing and rather showy blonde, whose father's grounds joined those of Stapleville Hall.

The young man was keenly disappointed, but he did not betray his vexation, though it must have cost him many a pang to see Ada's beautiful features aglow with interest as she eagerly listened to her companion's conversation.

"Frank will make more headway in an hour than I have made in months," he muttered under his breath; and then, repressing a groan, he turned his attention to the lady at his side.

Meanwhile Frank was fully justifying his friend's prophecy. Always charming and debonaire, he was seen at his best in a party of pleasure, and on this particular day he exerted himself with such success that Ada felt a little pang of regret when at the base of the Nest a fresh arrangement of partners detached him from her side.

Albert on the contrary breathed more freely. "This is compensation for my previous sufferings," as Ada accepted the offer of his arm over the difficult places, he said; "what, I wonder, was the particular sin which secured me that infliction for punishment?"

"Why do you libel Miss Barclay in that way?" the girl asked. "I think she is very good company, and Mr. Power seems to be of my opinion," with a glance at the pair in front of them.

"Oh! Frank finds everyone good company," the young man answered a little irritably; "he can extract amusement from the most tedious of bores."

"An excellent gift," the girl declared, "which is unfortunately denied to most of us," and then they wandered on in silence.

On the whole the excursion proved a triumphant success, and this result was due in no small measure to Frank Power.

His light-hearted gaiety seemed infectious; his handsome face was wreathed in joyous smiles; his eyes sparkled, and he had ever a good-humoured jest on his lips.

It was absolutely impossible to be dull in his society, and before the ending of the day he had established himself amongst Miss Moore's guests as a universal favourite.

The return to the Hall was accomplished in the same order as in the morning, and when they arrived there the merry guests began to disperse.

"You had better come with us, Ada," said Miss Maydew; "we pass your house, you know," and the girl gladly availed herself of the invitation.

"Good-night, Miss Marriot," whispered Frank, retaining the dainty hand in his a trifle longer than was needful. "I have to thank you for the enjoyment of a most pleasant day."

"Nay," she responded; "on the contrary, it is I who am your debtor."

He would have replied, but Miss Maydew's steed was becoming impatient, and handing her into the carriage he doffed his hat courteously.

At dinner that evening Mr. Marriot glanced at his daughter in surprise; he had rarely seen her looking more beautiful. The colour had deepened in her cheeks, and there was a fresh light in her eyes for which he could not account.

"It is needless to ask if you have enjoyed yourself," he remarked, smilingly, "I gather that from your face."

"Yes!" she said, with a pretty blush, "I think I have never spent such a thoroughly delightful day; everything passed off admirably."

It was customary when Aunt Heba could not come down to dinner for Ada to spend an hour or two in the drawing-room with her father, but this evening the girl excused herself on the plea of fatigue.

"Good-night, dear papa," she said, holding up her face to be kissed. "You will forgive my running away so soon, will you not? It is horribly selfish of me I know; but I am very tired."

He stroked the silken tresses fondly. "Good-night," he said, "and try to sleep soundly."

But though physically fatigued Ada knew that for the present at least sleep was out of the question, and slipping on a dressing-gown she blew out the light and seated herself at the window.

To the glory of the summer day had succeeded the quieter beauty of a moon-lit night. The sky was flecked with white dimmy clouds, so slight and gossamery that they scarcely intercepted a particle of the radiance in which the earth lay bathed.

It may well have been that the girl was influenced by the beauty of the quiet scene, but whatever the cause, she felt a new sweet happiness in her heart.

She thought over the events of the day just past, and ever before her eyes was the vision of a handsome face, and in her ears sounded the echo of a soft musical voice.

And while she sat thus heedless of the flight of time, wrapped in the contemplation of this strange, undefinable joyousness which had come to her, Albert Pottinger was striding to and fro in the Hall grounds, striving to crush out the bitterness rising in his heart.

He was a strong man, and his suffering was proportionate to his strength. From the first he had loved this girl, and had dreamed of the day when he should ask her to be his wife.

The last few hours had shattered his dream to atoms. Even before Frank's arrival the intensity of his love had enabled him to anticipate the danger, and Ada's eyes that afternoon had shown him that his fears were not groundless.

"I have been foolish," he muttered, "in thinking the child could learn to love me, and yet, oh! Ada, my darling, life will be very dreary without you."

Presently he grew calmer.

"If only I were sure of Frank's worthiness," he said; "but I fear he is weak and vain. However, he has gained her love with his handsome face and his smooth tongue. Heaven grant she may never repent it."

He walked wearily to the house, and avoiding the billiard-room, where the gentlemen were assembled, crept softly upstairs.

### CHAPTER III.

To Ada Marriot the day of the picnic was the beginning of a new and fuller life. She asked herself no questions as to the reasons. She was content with knowing that for her the sky had grown bluer, the earth more fair; that the flowers had assumed gayer tints and gave forth a sweeter fragrance; that the song of the birds thrilled with a deeper and more joyous melody.

Each morning she rose from her bed with a keen sense of anticipated pleasure, and when at night she laid her head upon the snowy pillow she thanked Heaven for the happiness of the day.

But the secret of which she herself was as yet barely conscious remained undiscovered by the little world around her. Only Albert, made prescient by the keenness of his own affection, perceived that she had changed.

To him the girl's growing love for Frank appeared clear as the noonday sun, and often he wondered within himself how it would all end.

At first he endeavoured to persuade himself that his friend was indifferent; but as the days passed he found it no longer possible to hold this theory.

One morning he had left the house, and was sauntering slowly through the grounds, when Isabel overtook him.

"Why did you not ask me to accompany you?" she inquired with simulated indignation; "you seem desperately anxious to avoid me of late."

"The cause is simple," he returned; "you will find little pleasure in my society."

She laughed merrily; but as she looked into his face her own became grave.

"Albert," she exclaimed, "do you know I shall be obliged to scold you? You ought really to be ashamed of yourself. Have you forgotten that Ada will be at the house shortly?"

"Forgotten!" he returned with a passionate outburst; "do you not know me better than to ask that question?"

"Then why have you run away?"

He turned upon her almost fiercely.

"Do you fancy my heart is a stone, and that it is incapable of suffering?" he asked.

She placed one hand lightly upon his arm.

"You are excited," she said, with a sweet tenderness, "and over-wrought. Try to compose yourself, and let us discuss the matter calmly. It is true that Mr. Power is in love with Ada, or fancies he is; but what of that? Is the fact of his rivalry sufficient to frighten you away? Surely you cannot be as weak as that!"

He did not reply, and she continued, gently,

"Courage, Albert! why should you despair? Mr. Power has no advantage over you; indeed, in my opinion, your chance of ultimate success far outweighs his."

The young man shook his head despondingly.

"I appreciate your friendly intentions, sweet one," he said; "but believe me you are mistaken. Ada is in love with him, and he with her. How could it possibly be otherwise? And how could I, with any hope of triumph, pit myself against him? No, Belle, the dream is ended! It was sweet while it lasted, and now—ah, well! I am strong!"

She looked at him pityingly.

"Will you not return?" she whispered. "Ada will think it odd you are not there."

He laughed a little bitterly.

"Frank's society will suffice," he said, "my absence will not even be noticed."

The girl returned sadly to the house, more especially as in her heart she realised the truth of what Albert had said. There could be little doubt of Frank's growing affection for her friend, and she feared lest Ada should be fascinated by the glamour of his charms.

Personally, she cared nothing for the marvellous attractions of the handsome stranger. She cheerfully recognised his good looks and the captivating courtesy of his manner; but to use her own phrase, "he did not ring true."

Still she could do nothing but wait with what patience she could muster in the hope that, of her own free will, Ada might reject his suit.

One afternoon these four had been playing at lawn-tennis. The last game was concluded, and Isabel had gone to the house to request that tea might be served on the lawn.

Shortly afterwards Albert followed her, and the other two were left alone.

Ada seated herself in a garden-chair. She was looking very beautiful; the physical exercise and excitement attendant upon the game had brought a rosy flush to the fair cheeks, and her eyes sparkled.

Frank looked down on the beautiful face and his heart beat fast.

"Miss Marriot," he said, suddenly, and there was a tremor of pain in the musical voice, "are you aware that my holiday is drawing to a close? In a few more days I must bid farewell to Stapleville."

Instinctively the long silken lashes drooped over the girl's eyes and she could not trust herself to look at him.

"These last few weeks have been a happy time for me," he continued, in a low tone; "it will be weary work going back into the world."

Ada perceived an opportunity of replying, and availed herself of it.

"That is the worst of holidays," she declared, lightly, "they are dreadfully demoralising. Do you not agree with me? I always think one loses the desire to return to duty."

The handsome face was bent a little lower still, but the burning passionate words that leaped to his lips were never uttered.

"Beg your pardon, sir, but I've been to the house, and the lady said you were Mr. Power. A shilling to pay, please."

Frank took the coin from his pocket and gave it to the messenger, who unperceived had crossed the lawn from the Hall.

"Shall I wait for a reply, sir?"

The young man opened the envelope and drew out the flimsy paper.

His face went ghastly white as he read the brief message.

"No," he said, huskily, "there is no reply." Then, turning to the girl, he added, "You will excuse my abruptness, Miss Marriot. My holiday has indeed come to an end."

"You have received bad news?" she said, softly.

"My father is dead," he replied; "I must return at once."

She longed to comfort him, but she could find no words, save the old familiar speech,—

"I am sorry."

He bowed gravely.

"Here are Miss Moore and her cousin," he said, "please tell them; I will go and dress."

He raised his cap and turned towards the Hall.

"Miss Marriot will explain," he said to the others; and the next moment had disappeared within the house.

"What is it?" asked Isabel, excitedly. "Has he received ill tidings?"

The girl nodded.

"His father is dead," she whispered; "he is going home."

For a moment neither of her hearers made any reply.

There was something so startling, so uncanny in this bald announcement that they could only stand staring at each other in dumb amazement.

To them death appeared an incongruity on that beautiful day; something wholly out of harmony with the radiance of the lustrous sun, the bright blue sky, the joyous songs of the birds, the sweet fragrance of the flowers.

All around them nature throbbed and palpitated with living, teeming life, and yet here in the midst, right at their very feet, was cast the black shadow of gloomy death.

"It is very terrible," said Isabel, presently, and even her sympathetic tones appeared to produce a jarring note.

But even in the solemn majesty of death the needs of the living are still paramount; and with a short word of explanation Albert strode hastily in the direction of the stables.

"He will just catch the up-train," he muttered, and when a few moments later Frank descended the Hall steps the dog-cart awaited him.

"Good-bye," he said to Isabel; "I cannot thank you now for all your kindness. I have not seen your parents, but they will not think it ill of me when you tell them the reason for my hurried departure."

Then pressing Ada's hand, he climbed to his seat, and in another moment the girls were gazing silently at the fast receding vehicle.

It was a dreary drive, for neither of them spoke until they reached the station.

"Is the up-train in?" asked Albert, throwing the reins to a porter.

"No, sir; she is not due for the next five minutes."

"Just put the rug over the mare's back," he said, "and carry this portmanteau in. There is ample time, Frank; you follow the porter, I'll get the ticket."

Then when the train came thundering in, he found an unoccupied compartment, and pressing his friend's hand, he said,—

"Count on me, Frank; wire at once if I can of any service."

The other returned the pressure mechanically, but he made no reply, his mind was confused.

For the first time in his butterfly existence he was face to face with a dread calamity, and the shock overpowered him. Hitherto for him life and happiness had been one; with his sweets had been mingled nothing of bitterness; his cup of pleasure had been without alloy.

And even now, though he had loved his father it was anxiety rather than grief which affected him.

But when later he stood alone in the actual presence of Death he was conscious of naught else save the exceeding tenderness with which the dead man had loved him.

All thoughts of self were swept away by one great rush of sorrow, and he could do nothing



for a time but stand gazing in reverential awe at that motionless form.

Meanwhile Ada had returned to her home in a very subdued frame of mind, and had retired to rest early.

Until the receipt of that fatal message she had been so perfectly happy that the unexpected blow had been all the harder to bear.

And unfortunately she was powerless to aid him.

She felt certain he loved her, and that had it not been for this terrible interruption he would have avowed his passion; but in spite of this secret knowledge, in the eyes of the world he was merely her friend, perhaps not even that.

For several days she did not go near the Hall, and so it happened that she was unaware of Albert's departure for London.

It was two days after the funeral, when Isabel's cousin received a letter, which evoked the announcement that he must immediately set out for town.

"Is your letter from Mr. Power?" the girl asked, following him from the breakfast-room.

"Yes," he said; "poor Frank is proving the truth of the old adage, 'When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions.'"

"Has he some fresh cause for grief?"

"The knowledge will soon spread," replied her companion, "so I am betraying no secret; but I would not mention it elsewhere at present. Besides losing his father the poor fellow has lost his fortune also. I cannot clearly understand the account he gives here," tapping the letter, "but it appears as if he will be compelled to earn his living in downright earnest."

"And what is it you purpose doing?"

"Upon my word I scarcely know. For one thing my company will cheer him up a little, and there is just a chance that with a practical man at hand matters will turn out better than they appear at present."

Your friendship is worth securing," the girl said, admiringly; "but," with a little eagerness, "do not be too Quixotic, Albert; remember what is due to yourself."

He laughed good-humouredly.

"Have no fear, coz," he said; "there is still a large leaven of selfishness in my composition."

That afternoon Isabel walked over to Ellerslie, in the hope that she might learn how matters stood between Ada and the absent man.

In this, however, she was completely disappointed, the only definite information she obtained being that Frank had not as yet written.

"Still that is something," she said to herself; "there is a ray of hope left if he has not actually committed himself. Of course I am extremely sorry for what has happened, but I cannot pretend to hope that the day will come when I shall see the young man in the character of Ada's husband."

#### CHAPTER IV.

THE hope which Albert Pottinger permitted himself to entertain with regard to his friend's financial position proved entirely fallacious.

After careful study and numerous consultations with the lawyers it became abundantly clear that the death of his father had thrown the young man on the world empty-handed.

Deprived of the support of Albert's friendship and sound common-sense he would have been hopelessly beaten at the very outset.

He had recently stood face to face with Death, and now he was confronted by that which to a man of his temperament was a worse evil—the dread of poverty.

All his life had been passed in the warmth and light of the sunshine; now, without a moment's warning the blue sky was overcast; the flowers and the birds were dead; his enchanted valley of pleasure was converted into an arid desert.

In his perplexity he did not give much thought to Ada, and when he did it was to experience a sensation of relief that he had not spoken.

To give him his due he loved her as much as it was in his nature to love anyone; but his affection was a hot-house plant, which would not thrive in the chilling winds of poverty.

"Remember me kindly to your cousin and

Miss Marriot," he said, on the morning when Albert left him; "it will be long ere I enjoy such another holiday at Stapleville; when they learn the truth they will scarcely expect me."

"You will always be certain of a welcome at the Hall," responded his companion, warmly, "if you choose to avail yourself of it."

"Well!" exclaimed Isabel, when she and her cousin were once more together, "how have you fared?"

"Upon my word," he said, "it is difficult to answer you. With regard to Frank's private affairs, however, everything is unfortunately plain-sailing; he has nothing beyond what his pen will bring him in."

"That I fancy will not go far towards house-keeping on a luxurious scale."

"No! perhaps not, though he is clever enough in a way, and he is not exactly a novice, you must remember."

Isabel shook her head; she declined emphatically to place any faith in Frank's abilities.

"Besides," she said, "that is not the point in which I am particularly interested. I have no doubt you will take care he does not altogether fail. But what of Ada? Did he propose to her, on that eventful afternoon?"

In reply he repeated Frank's message, and she clasped her hands exultingly.

"That is conclusive," she said, "and I congratulate you. Depend upon it, nothing has passed between them, or he would have written. I will admit now that your fears had begun to infect me; but the danger is over. Give Ada his message, and in a week or two, ask her boldly to be your wife."

Albert found no difficulty in following the first part of this advice, but he had very great doubts regarding the success of the second.

Nor did his instincts deceive him. The girl's inherent nobility of character led her into error. She believed Frank loved her, and assuming this the rest was easy.

His very silence pleaded most strongly in his favour. A cruel fate had condemned him to poverty, and he was too generous to press her to share it with him.

But from the very nature of the case she could not reveal her secret to another, and thus it happened that Isabel, seeing her from day to day, became more firmly convinced of her cousin's ultimate success.

At length one afternoon the latter resolved to learn his fate. It was impossible longer to continue in this state of maddening suspense, of swiftly alternating hopes and fears.

Isabel, inventing some plausible excuse, had left them together, and they had wandered into the park.

They walked slowly down the avenue of stately oaks, and at the end Ada proposed to return.

"Your cousin will be expecting us," she said, with a slight blush, "and we must not keep her waiting."

For an instant the young man hesitated. It was no light matter upon which his mind was bent, for upon her answer to his question depended his future happiness or misery.

But he could keep no further silence; the effort to conceal his passion tortured him.

"Miss Marriot," he whispered, and the strange thrill in his voice caused the girl to turn hastily towards him in wonder, "will you listen to me for a few minutes? I do not know if you have already guessed my secret. I think you must have done. To me it seems as if every living creature shares the knowledge of that which I am about to utter. Ada, I love you! In that brief sentence is summed up the whole of my life. I love you! Now that I have told you, whether my passion prove hopeless or not, my mind is easier. My love for you has drawn me to Stapleville and kept me here, chained in silken bonds. At first I dared not hope, but even despair was insufficient to kill my passion. I loved you, even as I shall ever love you, with an overwhelming passion. For months your sweet face has haunted me, night and day. I live in your presence, even when you are not here. Every spot in these grounds with which you are associated is hallowed. Ada, can you give me hope? Can

I teach you to love me! Tell me, my darling. Do not fear; I am strong, and even should your answer condemn me to lifelong misery I will meet my fate bravely."

The girl drooped her head, and he saw that she was shaken with emotion.

"My darling," he cried, piteously, "do not grieve; every throb of sorrow will but make my own lot the harder to bear. Love cannot be forced, and if my affection wakes no responsive echo in your breast I cannot blame you. Only answer me. Bid me hope, or—"

He did not finish the sentence; he feared lest he should break down utterly.

Presently she turned her face towards him, and he read the answer in the look of pain which filled the soft brown eyes, and in the tears which trickled slowly down the beautiful cheeks.

"Oh! Mr. Pottinger!" she moaned, wearily, "my kind, true-hearted friend, why must my hand deal you this hateful blow! Your friendship has been very precious to me. Believe me, I am not ungrateful, and yet—and yet, I cannot frame the answer you desire. Let me be frank. As a friend you have the greatest respect and esteem I have ever felt for any man. Were I to consult my worldly interests I should unhesitatingly accept your offer. To your keeping I could entrust my happiness without a particle of fear. But I should ill requite your kindness, dear friend, by deceiving you. You would not have me feign a sentiment which I do not feel. Alas! that it should be so; but the love for which you ask I cannot give."

It seemed an age before he spoke, and she was frightened at the depth of despair in his voice.

"Do not think me impertinent," he said, "but I should like to ask one other question. It is for you to decide whether it shall be answered."

She looked at him inquiringly, and he continued,—

"Have you promised another that which you have denied me?"

Just for a second she hesitated, and then, looking him full in the face, said,—

"No! you are the first man who has done me the honour of asking me to be his wife."

"Thank you," he said, "I will not trouble you with useless protestations. That my love will endure for all time you know, and should the day ever come when, in my humble way, I can add, however slightly, to your happiness, you will find me ready."

The girl murmured some incoherent words in reply, and turned away sad at heart.

It was the first time she had witnessed a strong man's grief, and the knowledge that she herself had caused this bitter sorrow weighed heavily upon her spirits.

In the Hall grounds she encountered Isabel, who readily understood what had occurred.

"Where did you leave Albert?" she asked, and her companion pointed in the direction of the avenue.

"Has he told you?"

"Yes!" the girl answered wearily.

"And you have rejected his offer?"

"Yes!" she assented, "I told him that I could not be his wife."

Isabel took one hand in hers.

"Ada!" she said, earnestly, "have you done well? My dear, believe me, there is not in all England a truer hearted man than my cousin. Could you not grant him one single ray of hope?"

Finding the girl maintained silence Isabel continued,—

"Can you not find it in your heart to love him one little bit, Ada? There may be handsomer men than poor Albert, but none nobler or more generous. And he loves you so faithfully! Months ago I learned his secret, and it made me happy to think that you two whom I love so well would become united by such a sweet tie. Ada, in the name of our friendship, let me plead for him. Let me tell you of his kind and unselfish nature; of his honour and chivalrous bearing—"

The girl interrupted her with an impatient gesture.

"You cannot tell me more than I know, Belle," she exclaimed, "and your sorrow is not

reater than mine. But I do not love him, dear, and what more can be said?"

"And you have given him no hope?"

"How could I! He asked me to be his wife, and I gave him the answer I have given you."

"Poor Albert!" whispered the young man's cousin softly, "I pity him with all my heart."

And indeed the stately oaks, the growth of many a generation, had rarely looked down upon a greater grief than that of the man who, with bowed head, now walked disconsolately to and fro, shadowed by their giant branches.

He had loved, and loved in vain. All the affection of his mighty heart had been poured out upon this beautiful girl, who had nothing to offer him in return.

Had he been a weaker man the blow would have been less deadly, but the very strength of his nature served only to add to the intensity of his sufferings.

And he realised full well that although Time, the great healer, would eventually dull the terrible pain, it could never wholly eradicate it.

He was young and strong. In the natural course of events many years of life lay before him, and through them all he would ever be confronted by the misery of this love which would not die; nay would not even weaken.

Time would bring him new desires and fresh interests, but ever in the background would loom the shadow of his lost happiness.

Over in the west the dying sun sank slowly amidst a wealth of colours. The white flaky clouds were touched and glorified by marvellous tints, but to his keen anguish the man perceived none of these. Orange and purple and crimson met and intermingled, and finally faded into nothingness; the great golden orb disappeared, to be succeeded by the paler moon; here and there the bright stars twinkled merrily, or looked down, fixed and unchanging, and still absorbed in his grief he lingered on wearily.

Presently he felt the touch of a warm hand, and a sweet voice charged with an infinitude of compassion whispered,—

"Albert!"

It was a simple thing enough, but it broke the spell that had been fast gathering around him.

"Belle!" he said, "is it you? I fear my grief has made me selfish and forgetful. You have seen her! Ah, Belle, I am very weary just now! You must bear with me, child, for a little; I thought I had been stronger."

She did not pester him with a host of meaningless platitudes, but slipped her arm within his, and the gentle touch seemed to bear with it a certain measure of peace.

"The pain will be less keen later," he said. "I shall go away in the morning; when I return you will find me more composed."

"Were we mistaken?" his companion asked presently. "Is she engaged to him?"

"No! She told me frankly she is quite free; only she does not love me, that is all."

And then in silence they passed down the avenue, and returned to the Hall.

## CHAPTER V.

"ALBERT, who is your handsome friend? His face seems familiar to me in a vague way, but I cannot call to mind his name."

Albert Pottinger laughed somewhat sarcastically.

"I fancy there must be a large number of people in the same predicament," he observed. "But my friend can scarcely lay claim to your interest. Have you ever noticed a falling star?"

"Of course I have. What a strange question."

"Yet it forms a capital illustration. It falls across your line of vision for a brief period, and then shoots into space. During the course of the year thousands put in a momentary appearance, and are lost to sight."

"Yes!" with an air of interest.

"My friend, unfortunately, is one of these. He flashed across the horizon of society and was swallowed up, *voilà tout*."

Gertrude Stanhope made a motion of impatience.

"Now, my clever friend," she said, "translate all that into plain English; I do not follow your flights of fancy."

"Then I will bring my meaning within the scope of your comprehension. Frank Power was rich and in society; now he is poor. Have I made it plain?"

"Perfectly! In our creed poverty is the one deadly sin. But has he no redeeming virtue? Is he clever?"

"I believe he is in a way, though I fear his cleverness is not very deep."

"Oh! depth is immaterial in these days; we do not look beneath the surface. What does he do?"

"At present he just manages to keep the wolf from the door by his pen."

"Ah! why not bring him to see me? I might be of service to him."

The young man cast a glance round the luxuriously furnished apartment, and mentally contrasted it with the poverty-stricken appearance of Frank's room.

"Have you ever read the story of the philanthropist and the beggar?" he asked. "It is instructive. A rich man once took a starving beggar home and entertained him at a magnificent banquet. A few days later the beggar returned filled with reproaches. 'You have done me an ill turn,' he said. 'Formerly I was perfectly content with my dry crust; now I am constantly hankering after the choice viands with which you have made me acquainted.'"

"Nonsense!" she remarked sharply; "the parallel does not hold good. But anyway I am bent on making the experiment so do not thwart me. I shall reserve to-morrow afternoon expressly for the purpose of meeting this Mr. Power."

Albert shrugged his shoulders expressively. "A wilful woman," he observed, "must needs have her commands obeyed. Do not, however, blame me if your experiment should result in disaster."

"You are not very complimentary," she answered with a laugh; "but have no fear, I am quite willing to bear the responsibility."

Gertrude Stanhope, by the power of her beauty and talents, held an unique position in society.

She possessed many advantages, not the least of which was her personal appearance.

She was wonderfully beautiful, with regular features, a marvellous peach-like complexion, luxurious tresses of golden hair, and bright, sparkling blue eyes.

In addition to these attractions she was enormously wealthy, and had acquired the reputation of being a woman of genius.

Under the circumstances it cannot be wondered at that Frank Power eagerly grasped the opportunity which a sudden freak on her part placed within his reach.

Since his father's death, the lines had not fallen to him in particularly pleasant places.

Poverty had debarrd him from the society of those whose good-will was to him as the breath of his nostrils.

He had worked hard, and not without achieving some measure of success in the vocation he had adopted, but he was discontented and ill at ease.

Albert, noticing the elation which Gertrude Stanhope's message caused him, felt compelled to utter a warning note.

"If you follow my advice," he said, "you will send your apologies, while you remain at home and work. You cannot afford at the outset of your career to spend your time in dancing attendance upon a lady."

Frank flushed.

"Is not that rather absurd, old fellow?" he asked. "Surely I am not to deny myself the pleasure of passing a couple of hours in decent society! Besides, Miss Stanhope is herself well-known in the literary world, where I understand she wields considerable influence."

"And are you content to shelter yourself under the protection of a woman? Great Scott! I gave you credit for more grit than that."

"Ah! it is an easy matter for you to assume a virtuous indignation! Wait until you are in the mill yourself. But we need not prolong the

discussion. I am exceedingly grateful for Miss Stanhope's kindly interest, and to-morrow I hope to assure her of my gratitude."

"As you please. I have performed the first portion of my task; to-morrow afternoon I will complete it. Only when the time for useless regrets arrives, as it most assuredly will do, remember I have warned you, and do not load me with unjust reproaches."

Frank laughed gaily.

"You are exaggerating a mole-hill into a mountain," he said; "but in any case, you shall be held free from responsibility," and then having made the necessary arrangements Albert took his leave.

Left alone, Frank rubbed his hands gleefully.

"This is altogether delightful," he exclaimed; "if Miss Stanhope chooses to exert her influence on my behalf the future is assured."

It was characteristic of him that ever since his father's death he had persistently avoided coming to any definite conclusion with regard to his unsatisfactory relations with Ada.

Had his father left him the fortune he had anticipated there is no doubt he would have returned to Stapleville and pressed his suit.

But to this course the poverty in which he was plunged appeared to offer a fatal objection. Under the changed circumstances it was impossible he could marry her, and although his vanity led him to believe she loved him, he could not offer to release her from a tie which had never been formed.

In this dilemma it was natural to a man of his temperament to seek a solution in silence.

The high spirits in which he set out the next day to Paxton-place were not damped by the nature of his reception.

Gertrude Stanhope was really a woman of broad sympathies, and possessed of exquisite tact. With a few charming words of welcome she placed the young man so thoroughly at his ease that he almost forgot he was a comparative stranger.

"Mr. Pottinger informs me that you have devoted yourself to literature," she said, after the usual formalities were concluded.

"Yes," he replied, "that is correct in a sense, since I depend upon my writing for my daily bread."

She smiled sweetly, and by means of a few deft and skilful questions drew from him an account of all his hopes and aspirations, his fears and misgivings, the few trivial successes he had achieved, and the difficulties which blocked his path.

"I am always deeply interested in the career of a young author," she said. "If it is not too presumptuous on my part I should like to see some of your productions. I have acquired a certain experience, you know, which might be of service to you."

"You are too kind," he responded, vainly endeavouring to conceal his elation; "it would be the very greatest pleasure to me to secure your advice."

She consulted a little ivory tablet, hanging at the side of the wall.

"I must not entice you from your labours," she said, "though that I expect would prove a difficult matter; but I have an hour to spare on Thursday—from two to three—when you shall bring me some MS., and we will look it through. Now that is enough of business for to-day; let us talk of something else."

"What a magnificent woman!" Frank exclaimed, as an hour later the two men took their departure from Paxton-place.

Albert smiled grimly.

"Miss Stanhope is generally accounted the most beautiful and accomplished woman in London," he said, "and she is certainly one of the wealthiest. But I presume you are going home; you will not waste the remainder of the day?"

"Waste! Those few hours in her society have been an inspiration; they have done me more good than a week's composition. I feel now equal to any amount of work."

And yet that night when the blinds were drawn and the gas lit Frank's fresh store of energy appeared to produce but little fruit.



Hour succeeded hour, and he still sat at his desk with a virgin page before him.

He could not clearly grasp the requisite ideas; his mind absolutely refused to dwell upon the details of the story he had planned.

He could see nothing but the vision of a woman's face—a lovely face with a delicate peach-like complexion; a perfectly-shaped mouth with rose-red lips, and beautiful blue eyes.

The picture fascinated him; held him in thrall, made him incapable either of thought or action; he could but sit and dream idly.

The hours between then and Thursday seemed interminable, never-ending, and at the earliest moment he presented himself at the house in Paxton-place.

"You are punctual," Gertrude said, as he entered the drawing-room; "that is an admirable trait. But we must not squander time in paying compliments, since it is strictly limited. Now give me the papers, and endeavour to amuse yourself while I read them."

He sat down as she directed, and opened a portfolio of views; but his eyes wandered from the pictures to his hostess and would not be withdrawn.

Presently she laid the manuscript down and looked across at him.

"I do not wish to flatter," she said, "but I think you have no need to fear. This sketch, 'A Study in Colours,' appears to me admirably planned, and executed with great skill and delicacy. Have you contributed anything to the *Rosemary*? No! Then if you will allow me I shall be pleased to forward this to the editor; I am sure he will like it."

Frank stammered out his thanks awkwardly, but she interrupted him,—

"You owe me nothing," she said, with a charming smile; "but if you consider yourself in my debt you can easily cancel the obligation!"

"In what way?" he asked, eagerly.

"By succeeding. With your abilities you should take high rank in the world of literature, and I look forward with the utmost confidence to that time. Now, you must pardon my sending you away, but my carriage will be here shortly. Let me know if you hear from the *Rosemary*, and should you find yourself with an hour to spare remember I am always at home on Tuesdays."

She gave him her hand, which he pressed reverently and then withdrew.

He walked homeward in a species of mental intoxication. Once a thought of Ada crossed his mind, and he smiled to himself at the remembrance of the brief madness which had afflicted him.

How fortunate it was, after all, that he had not spoken! He recognised now that his fancied love had been but a passing dream.

He had dreamed of love, and now it had come to him with a vigorous palpitating reality. His pulse throbbed; the blood in his veins seemed liquid fire, every nerve thrilled with the emotion of his heart.

So strong and fierce was this passion that it swept away every thought of difficulty.

There existed but one barrier between him and the woman he loved, and that he would sweep away. He would become rich and famous. He was conscious of the possession of great talents, as yet but partially revealed. These should be pressed into his service. He would work day and night, and he would succeed.

He no longer felt fear or misgivings. Of his ultimate success he entertained not a particle of doubt. For the first time in his life he was strong and confident. He would carve a name for himself, a name of which even this beautiful woman should be proud.

A mad, infatuated dream, perhaps, but it was very real to him nevertheless; for Love, the mighty magician, had touched him with his wand and made all things possible.

## CHAPTER VI.

MEANWHILE at Stapleville life had fallen back into its usual channel.

The two girls still remained fast friends, and few days passed without their meeting.

Isabel often spoke of her cousin, but no allusion was ever made to Frank, so that when one morning she said casually,—

"I have had news of Mr. Power," Ada for the moment was thrown off her mental balance.

"Ah!" she replied, recovering her composure quickly, "from your cousin?"

"No! strangely enough, in a lady's letter. You have heard me speak of my distinguished friend—Gertrude Stanhope! It seems he has had the good fortune to be introduced to her. This is what she writes," and before Ada could prevent it she read aloud this extract from Gertrude's letter.

"Albert informs me that Mr. Power has been a visitor to Stapleville. He is a pretty boy, and not without a certain ability. He is rather smart and clever on the surface, and when he has worked out his vanity and self-conceit may be capable, I fancy, of great things. At present, however, he is in the calf stage, which no doubt you discovered for yourself."

"Gertrude has summed up the young man's character rather roughly," Isabel commented, with a furtive glance at her friend.

"I rather pity Mr. Power if the lady takes it into her head to instruct him in the art of good manners," observed the latter coldly, and Isabel laughed softly to herself.

Meanwhile in London events were taking the precise turn which Albert had dimly foreseen.

The intimacy between Frank and Gertrude had ripened rapidly, and on every possible occasion the young man frequented the house in Paxton-place.

At the same time he did not neglect his work, for even his madness did not wholly blind him to the fact that before he could hope to win Gertrude he must signally distinguish himself in his vocation.

As a poor, struggling and unknown *littérateur* it would be folly to address her; but that which was impossible to him now would wear a different aspect when he had won fame and fortune.

And it could not be denied that those pleasant afternoons in Paxton-place helped him wonderfully.

Gertrude's conversation was so bright and witty, so brilliantly epigrammatic that it refreshed him like a draught of generous wine, and he was conscious that to her influence he owed many of the best things in his writings.

But above all this he felt himself absolutely unable to avoid her house. To gaze upon her marvellous beauty, to look unrepined into her lustrous eyes, and, more than all, to drink in greedily the words of praise with which she welcomed his increasing reputation—these things formed the sole happiness of his life.

"Do you know," she said, laughingly, one afternoon, "I am beginning to fear!"

He regarded her so strangely that she laughed again.

"Not for you, but myself," she explained. "Once I heard you described as a fallen star, now you are most certainly a rising sun, and will soon be raised above my humble sphere."

"You are quizzing me," he said, unsteadily; "but even if I succeeded to the topmost height of my ambition the sun of my adoration would still shine high above me."

"Ah! now you are dealing in metaphors which I am not clever enough to understand. Let us descend to plain prose. Honestly, I congratulate you on the success of your last story in the *Rosemary*. It has set people talking; there is quite a number of literary men seeking for information of Frank Power."

"The praise belongs to yourself," he said, "it was you who furnished me with the idea."

"Then I am doubly glad since in a sense I may regard myself as a sort of joint-author."

She spoke lightly and unthinkingly; but had she seen the face of her hearer as he listened to her words she would have been seized by a keen regret.

"Such honour would be far above my deserts," he murmured, and Gertrude laughed again, half jestingly, half in earnest.

"Now," she said, "you are quizzing me; but I will overcome evil with good. You shall stay

and have a cup of tea; then I presume you will go to work."

"Yes; I have a chapter of a new story to finish."

That same evening, rather to Frank's surprise, Albert paid a visit to his room. The personal intercourse between the two friends had somewhat relaxed of late, partly due, no doubt, to a change in their sentiments; but also in some measure to the fact that Frank had now little leisure time on his hands.

"Welcome," he said, laying down his pen, "you are becoming quite a stranger."

"I do not care to interrupt your work," the other replied; "but just now I concluded to look in for half-an-hour, as I am leaving town during the course of the week. I am glad to hear how bright your prospects are."

"Thanks; I really believe I am in smooth waters at present; but of course much remains to be accomplished. Still I have at least made a move in the right direction."

Albert lit his pipe and smoked reflectively.

"Have you met Miss Stanhope to-day?" he asked presently, with a strange abruptness.

"Yes! why? Have I committed a crime in visiting her?"

"Certainly not; in fact, I presume you owe her some acknowledgment for her kindness. Still, as your friend, I would point out that a close acquaintance with her may prove dangerous to your peace of mind."

The young author coloured angrily.

"I do not care to ferret out the precise meaning of an ambiguous insinuation," he remarked; "the process is too fatiguing, and the result rarely comes up to one's expectations."

Albert smiled.

"I fear you are irritated," he said, "and yet I have no wish to wound your feelings. But I cannot stand calmly by and watch you practically committing suicide without making one effort to save you. You must be perfectly aware of my meaning; but if you like I will state it in plain language. What I fear is that you are allowing yourself to become entangled in a hopeless passion for a woman who will never care for you."

"Are you referring to Miss Stanhope?"

Albert nodded.

"You appear strangely interested in that lady. One would almost suppose you were in love with her yourself."

"The impression would be incorrect; but I know her well, and my knowledge enables me to warn you of the danger you are running."

"I suppose I ought to feel grateful, but I cannot say that I am. However, your advice is no doubt kindly meant," and dismissing the subject, he asked, "Are you going to Stapleville?"

"No; I have promised to visit some friends in Yorkshire. But I must not keep you longer from your work. Forgive my apparent rudeness, and believe I had nothing in view but your well-being. Good-bye."

"I must see Gertrude," Albert muttered to himself as he strolled in the direction of his club. "She must show him plainly the folly of his pretensions."

In all this the young man scarcely knew what motives actuated him, though he had a vague idea that he was acting in Ada's interests.

From her manner on that eventful day in the park he had partly guessed her secret, and believed she was confidently looking forward to Frank's return, an event which any entanglement with Gertrude Stanhope would postpone indefinitely.

On the morning before his departure into Yorkshire he presented himself at that lady's residence and sent in his card.

"I thought you must be abroad," Gertrude said, giving him her hand, "why have you deserted me for so long! I have been inconsolable."

"I scarcely thought my absence would have been noticed," he responded gaily; "surely amidst your numerous admirers one more or less does not count!"

"Now, I would give much to know if that is intended for sarcasm or flattery," she said.

"I never flatter," he answered, "and my nature is not a sarcastic one. But seriously, I have called

upon you this morning with a definite object in view."

"That is very tiresome, besides being uncomplimentary. I flattered myself you called for the purpose of enjoying my society, while after all it is merely a matter of business."

They both laughed heartily at her affected indignation, and for a time Albert did not revert to the reason for his visit.

Presently, however, Gertrude gave him the required opening.

"It must be extremely gratifying to you to learn of Mr. Power's success!" she remarked casually. "He is rapidly acquiring a reputation in the domain of letters."

"Yes; thanks, in the first instance, to yourself!"

"Now, that is sheer nonsense!" she said. "An author does not create a name for himself through the influence of any single individual. Nowadays, the public judges for itself, and a man stands or falls on his merits."

"I bow to your ruling. However, it is not of Mr. Power as an author, but as a man, I wish to speak. Do you remember the warning I once gave you?"

"Yes! What of it?"

"The evil which I then prophesied has come to pass. I am afraid in the future poor Frank will have little cause to remember your friendship with gratitude."

Gertrude looked at him in amazement.

"Your speech is a riddle," she said; "what is its meaning?"

"Have you not discovered that what might have been expected has happened? The boy has fallen hopelessly in love with you."

The blue eyes opened wide in genuine astonishment.

"You are mistaken," Gertrude said, "indeed you are; the boy has too much conceit to be in love with anyone but himself."

"Nevertheless, the fact remains; your beauty has bewitched him. Of course it is madness, infatuation, call it what you will; the name matters little."

Gertrude Stanhope leaned back with a sober look on her lovely face.

She was not a cruel woman, and it grieved her to think that she should be the means of inflicting pain upon anyone, and especially on her friends.

"I will send him away," she said presently; "he is young, and will soon forget."

"It will be a sharp remedy," her companion answered, "let us hope it will prove an effective one. And now I must bid you farewell. I have promised to run down into Yorkshire by the first train in the morning, and I have many things to arrange."

"Good-bye," she said, "I hope you will spend an enjoyable time," and as the door closed behind she added thoughtfully to herself, "Now, my dear friend, I wonder why you are so very much interested in my *protégé*."

Before retiring to rest that night Albert sat down to write to Isabel, and as one paragraph bears somewhat upon our story we will take the liberty of extracting it.

"With regard to the personal affair of which you are cognizant," he wrote, "I do not know if I have acted rightly in precipitating matters but that, rightly or wrongly, is what I have done."

"In my last letter I expressed a fear of what would probably happen, and the result has fully justified my opinion, though I am not sure that any real mischief has as yet been done. But as long as our friend remains in Gertrude's society, I fear he will think little of Stapleville, so I have given her a hint, and he will probably in a short time receive his *congé*."

When Isabel read this particular paragraph she laughed, angrily at first, but afterwards with unrestrained good-humour.

"Well! *mon cher cousin*," she exclaimed, "I must admit the action is perfectly characteristic, but if you imagine I intend to look on passively at your self-sacrifice you are greatly in error."

Having finished the perusal of the letter she sat down to consider to what use she could best put this piece of information.

Presently her face lighted with a pleasing smile and she clapped her hands.

"The very thing," she exclaimed eagerly. "I will write to Gertrude. If only he proposes to her, the game will be in our hands," and she went straight to the library in order that no time should be lost in putting her project into execution.

## CHAPTER VII.

IF Frank Power had felt any uncertainty as to his passion for Gertrude, his friend's blunt speaking would have routed it utterly.

After Albert's departure the young man remained for a long time recapitulating in his mind the words to which his companion had given utterance.

According to Albert, the passion which he had conceived for Gertrude was a hopeless one, and almost beyond the bounds of common sense!

Had he himself been a disinterested judge, he would probably have delivered a similar verdict, but in his infatuation he overlooked everything save the strength of his love.

Why should he despair of success? he asked himself. Truly, Gertrude was rich, but, though he could never hope to vie with her in wealth, he would speedily amass sufficient to lift him from the condition of comparative poverty.

But in truth all the possible objections which might have been raised by an unimpassioned spectator appeared to him beside the question.

His love was so great that it could not fail in eliciting a responsive echo.

To anyone previously intimate with him, the change in his character would have seemed little short of marvellous.

The wavering and irresolution which had appeared inherent in his nature had vanished, leaving him strong and full of set purpose.

Despite Albert's gloomy prognostications of defeat he would seize the first favourable opportunity for avowing his passion, and if, at the present, Gertrude refused him, he would return again and again undaunted.

Upon Gertrude herself Albert's revelation produced a far different effect.

She was honestly fond of the young man in many ways, though she perceived clearly enough the grave defects in his character; but of love such as he dreamed she had not the remotest conception.

His society interested and amused her; she laughed lightly at his foibles, and was proud to a certain extent of the success he had achieved, and with which she felt herself partly identified, but there her sentiments ended.

"It is so extremely stupid," she murmured, when Albert had gone; "why on earth should he desire to make love to me, and thus overturn all our pleasant arrangements? But whatever Albert's reasons may be, his conclusion is beyond cavil; I must send the young man away, though how to compass it I cannot imagine."

However the opportunity soon presented itself, and it occurred in this wise.

On the very next afternoon she was sitting in the drawing-room, when a servant brought in Frank's card.

"Yes," she said, after a little hesitation, "you may show Mr. Power in."

A glance at his face made it plain that something of importance had happened. His eyes sparkled; his cheeks were flushed, and it seemed to her that he wore an unusual air of confidence.

"I am glad to find you at home," he said; "I feared you would be out."

"You may thank Mrs. Levison," she responded with a bright smile; "she failed me at the last moment, and being thrown upon my own resources, I resolved to pass an afternoon quietly at home."

"Which seems to imply a tacit reproach to me for having disturbed your peace. But I really could not refrain from coming to acquaint you with my good fortune."

"Whatever its nature I congratulate you," she replied, "but at present remember I am in ignorance of what has happened."

"Well!" he said, "you will acknowledge it to

be an unprecedented stroke of good luck. I have been offered the editorship of *Gray's Monthly*."

"Then I do indeed congratulate you; your position now is assured."

"Yes!" he assented slowly, and with grave deliberation, "I have placed my foot on the ladder, and it shall not be my fault if I fail to mount to the top."

"You will not fail; trust in my prophecy. You possess the requisite ability; all that is required now is hard, steady labour."

He rose from his seat and stood in front of her. He was evidently labouring under the most intense excitement.

"Miss Stanhope," he said earnestly, "pardon the apparent rudeness of my question, but do you really mean that? Do you honestly believe that I have the power to make a name for myself? That my talents are sufficient to place me in the very first rank?"

Gertrude Stanhope had spoken of herself as a woman of experience, and she instantly recognized that some definite purpose underlay this appeal.

"You astonish me," she answered lightly; "I had no idea you were so terribly ambitious."

But Frank was not easily to be diverted from his object.

"Pardon me," he said, "you have not given me an answer to my question."

"Why are you so much in earnest?" she asked. "My opinion cannot affect the result, one way or the other!"

"Nevertheless I wish to hear it."

"Then I will tell you frankly," she said. "Without wishing to flatter, I believe sincerely that you are capable of gaining a very high place in the world of literature."

"Thank you," he said quietly, and for a moment neither spoke again.

Presently he continued,—

"Miss Stanhope, just now you expressed surprise at my ambition; did you realise the motive which inspires it your astonishment might be greater. It is of that which I am about to speak."

"We need not discuss that," she remarked.

"If you possess the ambition, the exact motive is immaterial."

But her companion was not to be denied.

"When I first had the happiness of meeting you," he said, "I was, with the exception of my one friend, adrift; helpless and hopeless on the sea of life. Fate had dealt somewhat harshly with me, and I had not the strength to stand up manfully against her blows. Had it not been for your timely aid I should most assuredly have foundered."

"Nonsense," she interrupted, "you are not giving due credit either to yourself or your friend."

"I willingly acknowledge the debt of gratitude I owe to Albert," he replied; "he has always proved a true friend. Still, that fact does not detract from the truth of my assertion. It was your kindness, and that alone, which lit anew the flame of hope in my breast. Through your generous friendship I began to perceive there was still a chance of success. I began to work in downright earnest. I have set before myself a stupendous task, but the words you have spoken this afternoon will prove ever a mighty talisman to ward off all thoughts of failure. Miss Stanhope, I feel that it is impossible to fail. Believe me, my speech is no idle vapouring; something assures me that as the years pass I shall carve a niche for myself in the Temple of Fame."

"You will have no more ardent admirer than myself," his companion rejoined.

He looked her steadily in the face.

"Can you guess the spring of my ambition now?" he asked. "You must; it is impossible to be blind to it, unless you willfully close your eyes. There is but one magician who could lend me the courage to speak to you thus, and his name is Love. Yes, Gertrude, I love you, madly, unthinkingly. Ever since the day we met your face has been with me; your voice has made music in my ears. Every sentence I have penned has been with the thought of you in my mind. I am no longer my own master, but



your slave. That is the secret of my ambition; it is that which gives me confidence, and will make my success certain. I am working for you; to make a name of which even you shall be proud. The task is hard, but the accomplishment is sure. Gertrude, look at me. This is a strange wooing, perhaps. Other men may have whispered to you of love in smooth and polished language, have praised your wondrous beauty, have flattered you—were that possible—with sweet delicious words. But I cannot dwell on these things. To me it is impossible to pick and choose tempting phrases, my passion is too intense. It hurries me along on the waves of a tempestuous sea; it overwhelms me; I am dashed hither and thither at the mercy of the billows, and through it all, there is but one fixed idea in my brain—"I love you." Do you understand that, Gertrude? You have been loved before, for your beauty would ensnare men's hearts, even against their will, but no one ever loved you with the passion I feel. It astonishes even myself. It makes me bold; it casts aside all fears and doubts which should be in a lover's heart. Because of my love I am strong and confident. I do not ask you now to be my wife. For the moment I am in the eyes of the world poor and struggling. But, my darling, when the day comes—as it shall come—when I have accomplished my task, when I can bring you honour and fame, then I shall ask you to marry me, and surely the very greatness of my love will kindle a spark of affection in your breast. Tell me, my darling, that it is so; that my heart has not deceived me."

The sudden cessation of his speaking created a painful silence in the room.

He stood gazing at her in earnest expectation. His heart throbbed violently; his cheeks were flushed; and his eyes shone with unwonted brilliancy.

For a few moments he remained motionless and unspeaking; but the excitement was too intense to be borne silently.

"Speak, Gertrude," he cried, with a masterful impatience, "tell me I am right, that you will learn to love me."

His companion moved uneasily; made as if to answer him, and hesitated.

The situation had become full of pain. The comedy she had lightly contemplated on the previous evening had grown tragic in its character.

The suitor whom she had intended to dismiss with a pleasant smile and a merry jest was transformed.

In this strong, passionate, commanding suitor she scarcely recognised the irresolute youth with whom, and at whose expense she had so frequently laughed.

Into her calculations had crept a disturbing element, upon the presence of which she had not counted.

Frank had spoken truly when he said her marvellous beauty had gained for her many admirers.

Arowals of love and offers of marriage plentifully besprinkled her career. Suitors of every age and rank had sued in vain for her hand, and her heart had not throbbed the faster by one iota.

But the very madness of this man's passion forced her to acknowledge its truth and its transcendent nature.

In the face of this marvellous intensity she could not jest; she could not make light of that which to him was the very essence of his being.

Neither was it a case for temporising.

She would not wound him more than was absolutely necessary; but at the same time her refusal must be of such a nature as not to admit of doubt.

"Mr. Power," she said, "this avowal has come upon me with startling suddenness. I will not attempt to discount the strength of your love, since I unhesitatingly believe in its sincerity and truth."

"It is just that one element which makes my task so painful. Since the beginning of our acquaintance I have regarded you as a very good friend, and absolutely nothing more."

"You will do me the justice to admit that

never by word or action have I given you cause to suspect any warmer feeling. I say this because it is utterly impossible for me to return the answer you wish. I do not love you, and my feelings for you will never be anything but those of ordinary friendship."

Several seconds elapsed before the young man answered, and his face was of marble whiteness.

"You do not love me," he said hoarsely, "do not love me. Why? Do you despise me because of my poverty?"

"When you are calmer, Mr. Power, you will regret having asked that question. I do not love you; is that not sufficient? Why should you seek for reasons?"

"But I must," he returned, with a quick, impulsive gesture; "the knowledge is imperative, in order that I may demolish the barriers which separate us."

Gertrude rose and confronted him.

"Mr. Power," she said, "believe me, I am sorry for the pain you suffer; I would not willingly add to it, which prolonging this scene must necessarily do. You have heard my answer—I will repeat it. I do not love you; I never shall. How can I give reasons? Am I responsible for the vagaries of love?"

The courage which had hitherto sustained him now broke down completely.

"Gertrude," he cried, in the abandonment of despair, "have mercy. Can you not understand that my life and my love are one? Do not send me away for ever; I cannot contemplate existence without you. Not to see you! Not to hear the sound of your voice; it will be worse than the solitude of death! Have you no pity?—no compassion? Were I lying before you physically injured by some terrible accident you would try every effort to assuage the anguish of my pain; but now you pluck out my heart by its roots and my agony does not even stir your pulse. Set me any possible task; bid me wait long years; anything, everything, so that you grant me one tiny ray of hope!"

The despairing passion which pervaded his voice and lined his features moved Gertrude Stanhope strangely, and had she thought the coming years might bring a glimmering of love to her bosom she might have yielded.

But she knew her own heart too well for such an idea to linger an instant, and there was no sign of hesitation in her voice as she replied,—

"Mr. Power, if I could do this thing I would; but it is an impossibility. To bid you hope when there is no hope would be a mockery. My answer will ever be the same. It is hard upon you, but there is no help for it. Call up your courage, and in this hour of bitterness prove yourself a man."

The suppliant look left his face; he drew himself up.

"Thank you," he said, "I will take your advice; I will prove myself a man."

She gave him her hand which he pressed mechanically, and walked out of the room.

Instinct alone guided him through the busy streets in the direction of his rooms, for though his eyes were open he saw nothing clearly, and his dizzy brain refused to record any fresh impressions.

Giving brief orders to his landlady that he was not to be disturbed, he locked his door and sat down.

The thoughts which passed through his mind did not present themselves in any logical sequence, they were disjointed, involuntary, and utterly beyond his control.

Hour after hour he remained with his head bowed, dreamily conscious that he had received a heavy blow, but only very gradually did he begin to realise its true nature.

His brief mad dream had ended. He had declared his passion, and it had been ignominiously rejected.

As Gertrude had foreseen her apparent cruelty had been the truest kindness, since it deprived him of every vestige of hope.

Whatever his present misery might be at least he knew the worst; the agony of suspense was over.

Thus the long night hours passed and the early dawn still found him sitting there striving to

gather the requisite energy to confront with firmness the misery of his dreary future.

## CHAPTER VIII.

ALL this time events at Ellerslie had moved on in their accustomed channels, and though Dr. Marriot noticed with dismay a gradual decline in his daughter's high spirits he little suspected the cause which occasioned it.

Ada, indeed, never mentioned Frank's name; but in spite of his continued silence she had not lost faith in him.

True, he had never confessed his love in so many words, but the speech of the eyes is far more eloquent than that of the tongue, and she was sure in her heart that he loved her.

At the first his very silence impressed her far more than a torrent of words would have done.

To her imagination it appeared a strong proof of the nobility with which she had invested his character.

"Now that he is poor," she said, "he wishes to leave me free. He fears, perhaps, that poverty will frighten me, and will not speak until he has gained an assured position."

Then by degrees she began to learn of his increasing reputation and popularity, coupled with exaggerated accounts of his intimacy with Gertrude Stanhope.

At length, as the time wore on without his making any sign, a vague suspicion found entrance into her heart, hazy and indistinct at first, but gathering strength and substance with the passing days and assuming definite shape.

Was it possible she had deceived herself—that the love upon which she had fed her happiness was but a figment of her imagination?

But she was a loyal hearted girl and strove desperately to dismiss the suspicion as unworthy of her.

Just at this time, however, a careless speech of her friend's brother occasioned her deep distress.

(Continued on page 285.)

## AS IT FELL UPON A DAY.

—10—

## CHAPTER XVII.

ANNE HUNTLEY stood very still indeed for the space of one moment after Rachel had launched that passionate accusation against Bastian.

A woman can succeed in stifling the yearning hope of her love when she realises that there is no place for that hope, but it takes an enormous amount of positive proof to upset her in her faith in his good qualities, or to destroy the idealizing tenderness with which she garbs his whole nature.

Anne had more than loved Bastian Lithgow, she respected him, and believed in him above all human beings; he had from the first inspired her with that sense of goodness and strong wisdom which Rachel had found so true and comforting, and, therefore, although she knew Rachel would never have spoken such words without the strongest reason, she nevertheless remained firm to her belief in the man's honesty and straightforwardness.

"Some one has been making mischief," she said very hurriedly when she spoke; "some one has been inventing stories against Bastian, otherwise —"

Then Anne pulled herself up rather sharply; she had spoken almost unconsciously; "but after all, perhaps, you had better explain more clearly what you mean, Rachel," she said. "Your words and your manner are so odd that it has made me jump to the idea that you are suggesting Bastian has done something wrong. If—as you say—he is abroad with some one—he has, of course, every right to do what he has done—he is a free man—and there is no crime in his caring for anyone—I—I made a mistake in what I said just now, I suppose, that must be all!"

Anne pulled a chair forward as she spoke, and

sat down; her voice was clear and quite steady, but she was trembling a little in her limbs. Rachel's words had given her a shock. Rachel moved about the room rather uncertainly, she laughed as Anne ceased speaking.

"Oh! for a little tiny grain of your calm nature, Anne!" she said, not without a touch of contempt in her voice. "Just look how different we are. I fly off at a tangent, and make a howling row all for nothing, and all about nothing. And you—put everything right in a moment. Naturally, as you say, Bastian is a free man, he can do what he likes—"

She broke off abruptly, and Anne kept her eyes fixed steadily, and not untenderly, on the slender little figure in its pretty grey gown.

"Tell me just what has happened, Rachel," she said, after a brief pause. "I see you are upset about something. Perhaps I may be able to advise, or—"

Rachel laughed again and shrugged her shoulders.

"Where did you get that extraordinary idea about Bastian?" was her reply, given in the form of a query.

"What extraordinary idea!" Anne asked in her usual calm measured voice.

"About his caring for me!"

Rachel said the words almost as if they hurt her. Her face flamed with colour. She was almost suffocated by the sudden fierce beating of her heart. She had imagined herself trained by now to know something of the meaning of emotion; her passionate rebellion against the workings of fate in the past had seemed to run her through a very cycle of wild and disturbing feelings, yet no such power as possessed her now had ever come in the past. Beside this intense response of her whole nature to the very mention of Bastian's name, her childhood's romance seemed to divide into puny lines, to grow weak, sentimental and foolish. She had not time in this moment to realize the full value of what Anne's words conveyed to her, but the reaction was so tremendous, the possibility of there being any truth in the suggestion so overwhelming, that Rachel felt herself a changed creature, and she hardly knew how to control herself.

Anne's keen eyes noted that flaming colour; her ears caught the sound of the hard curt note in Rachel's usually pretty voice, but she understood neither.

She mis-read these signs; she thought they denoted temper, and the effect of this was to make her temper rise also.

"I do not think it is a very extraordinary idea, Rachel," she said in her primmest fashion (the manner that Rachel sometimes had described to Bastian as being so "Sunday-school-ery"); it is on the contrary a very natural one.

"Is it?" queried Lady Castletown; she had flung herself into a chair again and was twisting her pretty gloves about in her hands rather ruthlessly.

"I think it is," Anne went on quite evenly. "Bastian has known you since you were a child, and he has always been fond of you. What could be more natural than that his affection should deepen and ripen as time has progressed?"

"Bastian being absent, of course no one can give you a direct reply to such a question," said Rachel, her quick sensitive pride instantly resenting Anne's matter of fact dealing, "but if you ask me, Anne, I should say that such reasoning was all bosh! Of course I know Bastian is fond of me; he is fond of everybody; he has a large heart, and no doubt if somebody else had obtained the biggest share in that heart your pretty little romance about me might have come true. As it is!" she teased her gloves up in the air and looked across at her sister. Her expression was not quite clear to Anne in this moment. "As it is, you see you are all wrong for once!"

Anne was silent; she was perplexed, most unhappy and a good deal out of temper; Rachel's manner however was so reckless, so difficult to deal with, that Anne determined to curb her temper as well as she could.

When she spoke again her voice was much softer.

"Don't tell me anything if you don't want to

Rachel, dear," she said half wistfully. I only speak so plainly because you seemed troubled, and I thought—"

Rachel had flown across the room here and interrupted her sister with a caress and a kiss.

Then she turned round a little stiffly and stood with her back to Anne.

"I am troubled, awfully, dreadfully troubled, Anne! and I am a beast to lose my temper; but you know what I am when anything upsets me! I will tell you all that has happened!"

She did so in a quick, half nervous way; she began from the very beginning, and ended by bringing things up to that moment.

"It is now a whole week since Nell went, and not a word, not a sign from her, not a word, not a sign from Bastian."

"And you think she has gone to him, you believe Bastian is the cause of her trouble?" Anne's voice was laden with incredulity.

"I don't think, I am sure," Rachel answered a little sullenly. "Everything points to this being the one, only true explanation of all that has happened."

Anne rose impetuously from her chair.

"Dear child," she said gently, and yet with more warmth than Rachel had remembered hearing in her voice for years past. "Dear little Rachel, you must not accept such an explanation. I know nothing, but I would stake my life on Bastian's innocence. He is simply incapable of wronging any woman."

Rachel drew herself away with a little laugh.

"Oh, you are too good, Anne. All your church work makes you a saint, and makes you think other people are saints, too. Now I am a woman of the world, and—"

"Will you let me see Miss Foster's letter?" Anne asked very quickly, wisely ignoring this sneer, though it hurt her keenly.

"What use? I have repeated it to you word for word."

"Pardon me, Rachel; but I must insist on seeing this letter. You have brought a shocking accusation against a man I hold to be as honourable and as good as the world can produce. I must have some proof for this accusation, and I must work with you now to do all I can to help to right the wrong that has been done to this most unhappy girl, whether it be Bastian who is to blame or another."

Rachel pretended to laugh in her old impertinent fashion.

"Don't use that authoritative tone to me, Anne," she cried. "You make me creep all over. Another moment and I shall begin to cry, and say, 'Please, teacher, it wasn't me.' You have no idea how stern you look."

Anne sighed; certainly Rachel was a trial sometimes; but her whole honest, truth-loving heart had been stirred to its depths by what she had heard, and she could not let her irritation conquer her desire for justice.

"Let me see the letter, please, Rachel," was all she said.

Rachel shrugged her shoulders, and went across to her writing-table. She unlocked a drawer and took out poor Eleanor's letter.

A mist of tears crept over her beautiful eyes as she looked upon the hurried writing. She had been too angry all this miserable week to have given Eleanor the measure of pity her suffering deserved, and which her own innate tenderness and sympathy would have given so freely under other circumstances.

"Read it," she said to Anne, "and see what solution you can make for this most wretched problem."

Anne was not two minutes in reading through Eleanor's most pathetic and semi-incoherent letter.

Her breath came quickly, and tears dimmed her eyes as she read. For all her outward calmness and prim manner Anne Huntley's womanliness, and woman's sympathy, were most strong and active.

Her life in the parish of Silchester had brought her face to face with sundry small tragedies; she knew what the cry of real heart anguish meant, and there was this unmistakable cry in poor Eleanor's written words.

For first feeling was one of profoundest pity

for the writer, then amazement and something like anger for Rachel.

"You call this letter proof of Bastian's complicity with Miss Foster's unhappy story!" she asked, and there was no mistaking her voice.

Rachel just looked at her, and nodded her head.

"Yes," she said half doggedly, "I do."

"But—" Anne paused; she really hardly knew what to say. "But there is not one word here to link Bastian's name with—there is absolutely nothing—nothing, Rachel, upon which to build an accusation."

"Oh!" impatiently. "How obstinate you are, Anne! Haven't I just told you all that happened? Have you forgotten what I said about Nell's falsehood to me? She went to Bastian that afternoon when she was ill—she told me she had been to see her doctor—she came back in a despairing condition. Recalling everything now I can understand she must have been quite desperate—something must have occurred to send him away suddenly, and when she heard he had gone she just lost her head, and—but you are not believing me, Anne!—you are not following me in the least! I will say no more, for I can see you have made up your mind not to credit anything I say."

"Unless you can give me some stronger proof than mere senseless imagination to urge your accusation against Bastian I certainly shall not credit one word of this you are telling me!" Anne cried hotly. She folded up Eleanor's letter. "There is one thing you have not told me, Rachel," she said more calmly the next moment "and that is the most essential point of all. What was it that first—or rather I ought to say who was it that first put the idea of associating Bastian with Miss Foster into your mind?"

Rachel looked round startled. Events had followed one so quickly after another, everything had been so confused, so exciting, and so terrible to bear during the last few days that she had quite lost sight of the starting point of all the trouble. She had nursed her wrath against Nell, and against Bastian; she had been so miserably unhappy, lost in her own personal share in this business, that she had forgotten whence it had all come, and how it was that her mind had been suddenly turned to so much anger, bitterness, jealousy, and suffering.

She remembered everything now with a flash; she recalled the hot pang of pain that had gone through her heart when Giles Hamilton had first spoken those few seemingly simple words, and how quickly they had sunk into her heart, and changed the whole meaning of her life. She answered Anne's question very hurriedly.

"It was from Captain Hamilton," she said; "but don't imagine he meant anything!" she went on more sharply as Anne uttered a low exclamation. He spoke in the most casual way of Bastian's former interest in Nell. He was quite unaware he was putting a different complexion on things by what he said. In fact, what he did was most natural; but he opened my eyes, nevertheless, and let me see how nearly Bastian had tricked me into being kind to this girl, and how gently and quietly Nell had deceived me!"

Anne put the letter down on to the broad mantel-shelf; her lips were compressed very tightly.

"Captain Hamilton's words are to be regretted, unless, of course, he had the best of reasons for suggesting anything against these two," she remarked; then very hurriedly, "and you have let a whole week go by without trying to find some trace of this poor girl! Rachel! is this you? Is this charitable—is it pardonable? After such a letter as this to let her go out into the world alone, helpless!"

"I tell you she is not alone, she has gone to Bastian!" Rachel cried back passionately, her cheeks flaming, for the reproach went very sharply home to her.

"And I tell you—she has done nothing of the sort! You have absolutely no right to make such an assertion," Anne cried back, just as hotly. She changed her tone quickly, however. "And even then, even supposing she has gone to Bastian, by what right do you dare to stand and judge her! What is Bastian to you! You



scold at his love, you credit him with dishonour so easily; you deny him ordinary justice or right. Why should you grudge this girl his protection, if, as you insist on declaring, he is the proper person to make reparation of her wrong? "Come to be a child, Rachel, for once!" Anne Huntley said, coldly and sternly; "you have acted most foolishly. I am amazed at your folly—more amazed still at your unkindness. Had such a letter as this been written to me—a letter written in a woman's heart blood as it were!" She paused, and then she dropped her voice. "Shall I tell you what I read from this letter, Rachel? I read the cry of such unutterable misery and despair that I tremble to think of what may not have happened to Eleanor Foster! A week has gone since she left your house—a whole week!—and you have made no effort to find her! She left you very ill, goaded by someone or something, to rush out into the world alone, haunted by the fear of bringing shame on her father, sorrowing most truly for the loss of your love! I tell you, Rachel—horrible as it may sound, I should not be surprised to hear that Eleanor Foster had—"

But Rachel stopped her sister suddenly. "Don't!" she said, hoarsely; "don't, for Heaven's sake don't, Anne! You will kill me if you say any more. Oh! Nell—Nell dear! what have I done? what shall I do to help you? Anne," feverishly, "Anne, we must do something at once—at once! Oh! Anne dear, pray that she is safe!"

Anne bent over the bowed form and took it into her arms with all the clinging love of a mother for a child.

"Rachel! I have said too much. I have jumped to conclusions. Don't fret, darling. I will do all in my power to help you, and we must find her immediately."

"She was so ill, so weak, so unhappy; if—"

Rachel's voice was still strained and hoarse; her eyes were tearful and hot, she was suffering acutely now; her self reproaches were overwhelming.

"She is lying ill somewhere, that is what will have happened!" Anne said as calmly as she could, "and this is why you have not heard from her. You see she said in her letter she would write and tell you where to send her things. I am convinced she would have kept her word had she been able to write."

Rachel allowed Anne to talk away in this strain, and her sister's manner was so matter of fact and so comforting from its very practicality that the horrible fears that had swept over her were gradually calmed.

"We will do all you say, Anne," she agreed after a little while, "but how are we to set about finding her? Must we have a detective? I hate the thought of them, and yet how are we to find her all by ourselves?"

"Leave it to me, I can be very clever sometimes," Anne said with rather a wan smile; "we will do without a detective if we can possibly manage. I shall go first to the office; by making indirect inquiries I hope I may come upon a clue. Her father will, of course, know nothing, and yet he may still have had some communication from her. I will go there now, Rachel, and you might be very good and go and sit with Aunt Marian, she will be feeling lonely in an hotel room all by herself; will you do this, dear?"

Rachel assented eagerly to everything Anne suggested.

"I shall never act on an impulse or my imagination again," she said, not lightly, but very solemnly. "Of course I will go and sit with dear old Bunny, and I will bring her back with me to dinner. Anne, you will not be longer than you can help, will you? And, oh! Anne," as a sudden thought went through her brain like an inspiration, "don't you think we might telegraph and ask Bastian to come home at once? He ought to be here to go into everything!" Her beautiful face flushed as she spoke, and then grew very pale again.

She let Anne go from her eagerly, and yet most unwillingly.

"It is I who should go and look for my poor Nell," she said to herself as she was left alone; "but, after all, I do make such hopeless muddles

of everything, and Anne goes at a thing so cleverly, so neatly. How confident Anne is! Her nature must be ever so much better than mine. I—I believed everything had against them, and an hour ago I would have fought to keep this belief. Am I cruel? Anne hit me pretty hard!"

She put up her hand and took up Eleanor's letter from the mantelpiece, then, as she was beginning to read it again, she crumpled it in her hand passionately.

"No, no," she said, swiftly. "I must not read it! Her poor heart-broken words go through me—and then the doubt comes back. I don't want to doubt you, Bastian, dear! but something seems to tell me I must!" She stood with her hands clenched together with Eleanor's letter in them for a long time. "So natural," Anne said, she whispered to herself, "so natural that Bastian should drift into an affection for me. I know I have his affection, but I want more than that, I want him!" Rachel said with a touch of intensity in her thoughts, "to love me, as I love him!—to belong to me—and to me only! To have no other thought except for me. Oh! I am selfish—selfish—miserably selfish! but I would go through the world barefooted, a beggar. I would be happy to lose all I have if I could only know that Bastian loved me well enough to ask me to be his wife!"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

It seemed to Rachel a century before she saw Anne again. True to her word, she had gone to the hotel to meet Mrs. Langridge, and she had laughed and chatted in her old bright fashion, and had been so amusing that Bastian's mother had given to herself the great consolation that the girl was really, absolutely happy.

"Anne has gone into the city on an errand for me!" Rachel had explained when she had greeted her aunt; "she may be late, so we are to amuse one another till she comes back."

"I wanted to see my boy so badly," Marian Langridge had said, half-wistfully as she watched Rachel sit about the room. "I can't understand why he should have gone away so suddenly, and he has never written!"

"He is enjoying himself too much, Bunny, dear, depend upon it—our dear, solemn Bastian is engaged in flirting with some big, black-eyed Senorita in sunny Spain!"

"Bastian never flirts, Rachel," Mrs. Langridge said, most seriously.

"Oh! you don't know what Bastian can do when he is roused!" Rachel cried. She was grateful to her aunt's mental shortightedness. Anybody more discerning than Mrs. Langridge must have seen that the girl was labouring under the greatest excitement; that her laughter was forced, and her merriment all a sham.

As the evening drew on she drove her aunt back to Eaton-square to dinner.

Anne was to join them there, as soon as she had changed her gown.

Some letters and a telegram were waiting for Lady Castletown. She opened the telegram first, and her heart seemed to throb in her throat as she read it.

"Bunny, what do you think?" she cried; "here is a telegram from your boy, he has returned to town to-day and he is coming here this evening!"

Mrs. Langridge gave a little exclamation of joy.

"Oh! let me see what he says!" she pleaded, and Rachel's eyes glistened as she watched the mother's delight.

"He is coming, he is coming," she said to herself, breathlessly, "and I have called him base; oh! how I hate myself."

She ran away to dress for dinner, leaving Mrs. Langridge in a glow of content.

Even the sickening suspense about Eleanor slackened a little at thought of Bastian's coming.

It was curious Rachel never once brought Giles Hamilton into her thoughts in connection with Eleanor's disappearance; nor as the moments had passed had that doubt that had been so convincing about Bastian lived with her again.

Everything was exciting, chaotic; she was in fact almost ill from so much excitement, but in another sense she was grateful to it, for it saved her from coherent thought.

She hastily opened her letters as she put herself in her maid's hands.

The first one she read was from Mrs. Hamilton, the mother of Giles. It was a roughly pencilled note, and asked Rachel very courteously and prettily, if she would go that same evening and sit for an hour with one who was an invalid.

"I have some things I wish to say to you," Mrs. Hamilton wrote, "and I venture to throw myself on your kindness and to ask you to come and brighten my evening for a little while. We shall be quite alone, as my boy has to attend a regimental dinner. Pray do come if you can spare me the time, dear Lady Castletown."

Rachel had seen much of Mrs. Hamilton during the past week. At Giles' request she had gone there several times, and had charmed the worn and suffering woman by her beauty, her brilliant manner, and her undoubted sympathy.

"If she had not a penny in the world, she would still be an adorable wife for any man, Giles," Mrs. Hamilton had said once to her son after Rachel had gone, and that son had flushed hotly, as he recalled the days when Rachel had been literally penniless, and worthy of nothing more in his estimation than a passing flirtation.

The sight of the growing sympathy and interest between Rachel and his mother was a most hopeful and pleasant one to this desperate man, who was so determined to make Rachel his wife and her fortune his own.

He had been quick to take advantage of his good chances, and already those to whom he was most deeply in debt had given him a further lease of life, since there was every certainty of his becoming the husband of the rich Lady Castletown.

Rachel's mood, which had startled him considerably in one sense, had been a useful one to him in another.

He had taken advantage of her curious recklessness to urge her to do things which at any other time she would never have done. She had ridden with him, driven with him, and been seen with him in public almost every day of the week that had just gone—the real meaning of what she had been doing had never come home to Rachel till this afternoon, when Anne's quiet cold amazement had revealed it to her.

It had been a rush of anger against herself, mingled in with a fresh touch of recklessness that had made Rachel assert to her sister her intention of becoming Giles Hamilton's wife.

She could hardly have told why she had made that assertion then, save that she was no longer mistress of herself, and the whole jarring and distressing circumstances of the week were driving her into thoughts and deeds that were strange to her.

She remembered all she had said to Anne, and all Anne had said to her on the subject of Giles as she read his mother's note, and her face burned with momentary shame.

In this instant she saw how more than foolish she had been during the past week, and she could willingly have torn this week from the pages of her life, and have obliterated the memory of her folly altogether.

She had a wild desire upon her in this moment never to see either Giles Hamilton or his mother again, and before she changed into her pretty evening gown she had scribbled Mrs. Hamilton a letter declining the invitation.

She could not have explained why, but a sense of uneasiness for herself and her future settled upon Rachel after this was done.

If only she had been strong and true to her proud determination to keep Giles outside her life!

The motive for avoiding him had gone from her now, yet the knowledge that her first determination had been only too right was as strong as ever.

While she was dressing Anne came to her room. Instantly all Rachel's thoughts went from herself.

She dismissed Sylvie peremptorily; her lips moved rather than uttered the query.



RACHEL SANK DOWN UPON HER KNEES WITH A WOUNDED AND ACHING HEART.

Anne looked pale and tired, but she smiled faintly into Rachel's eyes.

"You must have no more anxiety. Miss Foster is in safe keeping," she said.

"You have found her—you have seen her? Oh, Anne tell me everything! I have been nearly wild since you went away."

"I know nothing definitely," Anne made haste to explain; "but I found my theory on very firm instinct. I went to the office as I told you, and there I found—whom do you think?"

Rachel grew suddenly pale.

"I know Bastian was there," she said not very distinctly. "I—I have had a telegram from him; he is coming here."

"Yes; he will be here directly. He only got back from Spain this morning, and he was very much astonished to see me walk in at his office."

Rachel's thoughts went back to the day only a week ago when she had gone to the office. Would she ever go again?

What was this cold icy horrible feeling that was closing in on her heart. She dreaded to hear Anne's next words, yet it was she who questioned.

"And Bastian set your mind at rest about Nell?" she asked almost casually, bending forward to pin a diamond brooch in her laces before the mirror.

Anne answered her sharply.

"How could he, since he knew nothing about anything? He was most dreadfully upset when he heard what I had to tell, he simply could not speak for a few moments; then he went into the whole business as far as I could help him, and then he hit upon the idea which will prove, I am sure, one solution at least of this problem."

Rachel touched the curls on her forehead, and surveyed her reflection in the mirror thoughtfully.

"What was the idea?" she asked quietly.

Anne went on hurriedly with all she had to say.

"He seemed to think one of his clerks, a Mr.

Robinson, might know something about Miss Foster; it appears this particular clerk has been very irregular in his attendance at the office during the past week, a most unusual circumstance with him, and Bastian had seen at once that something was very wrong the instant he returned. This young man has always been devoted to Miss Foster, and—"

"And so Bastian is going to put the blame on him?" Rachel said very quickly, very bitterly. Anne little knew the fatal havoc she was working in the girl's heart opposite; had she guessed at even a suggestion of the misery and unhappiness she was about to raise up by her words in the hearts and lives of the man she loved, and the sister who was so dear to her, she would have done anything rather than have spoken on as she did now.

Quick to resent the bitterness in Rachel's voice, quick to see that Rachel was impressed most wrongly by what she had to say, Anne lost her caution. She had had a most trying afternoon, and Rachel's peculiar mood was too hard for her to bear. Desiring only to spare Bastian from anything that might hurt his proud, honest heart, she took up the matter now very sharply.

"Rachel," she said, "I must beseech you not to let yourself so shamefully misjudge Bastian. I don't understand how you can imagine such injustice; but it is only too evident that you can and do think it possible Bastian is the cause of this girl's shame. He is here now, and will answer for himself, so he does not need my word in this matter; but—" Anne paused suddenly.

"You want to say something else?" Rachel queried, her face turned from her sister; she was quivering in every limb. She knew so well what it was Anne had to say.

The other girl conquered her emotion as well as she could.

"Yes, Rachel. I have something more to say, something more to ask. To-day," Anne caught her breath, "to-day I made a very bold assertion about Bastian. I—I don't know why I spoke

so definitely, but I have always imagined that what I said was true—and now—"

"Now," Rachel broke in with a choked sort of life, "you want to tell me you have made a mistake, and that the pretty little romance you were dreaming about Bastian caring for me is all untrue. Is not that what you want to say? Dear Anne, why bother yourself about it? I told you you were wrong, you know. We are making a great fuss about Bastian to-day for some reason or other, and after all, since you assure me Eleanor is safe, and that Bastian is going to make everything right, I don't see that we need trouble ourselves so very much more about what might or does happen. I am delighted Bastian is home for everybody's sake, particularly for dear Bunny's. Will you excuse me a moment, Anne? I must write a few lines. I will be downstairs immediately. You are a dear sweet," Rachel cried, breaking into her old manner as Anne moved away. "I don't know how to thank you for all you have done to-day. You have taken years off my life; I was getting quite old with anxiety!"

Anne Huntley went away slowly, only too conscious of the jarring note, yet unable to realize where it was exactly. She had spoken so plainly because she dreaded to see Rachel amuse herself at Bastian's expense, because she had wished to spare him the pain of Rachel's laughter, of his hope, his unconfessed dream, and she was so absolutely certain that Rachel was inclined to jest and make merry at his expense, and perhaps scoff at what was most sacred to him, that she had hastened to stand between him and this, little thinking that in so doing she had thrust a dagger into Rachel's already wounded and aching heart.

If Anne could have glanced back into the room and seen her sister crouching down by her writing table, her beautiful head bowed down on her arms, she would have seen only too clearly the mistake she had made, and have trembled for what was to come from it!

(To be continued.)





"EVER SINCE OUR FIRST MEETING I HAVE LOVED YOU, VERA," SAID DUDLEY MADDOX, GENTLY.

## THE GREYSTOKE MYSTERY.

### CHAPTER XXII.

FOILED.

VERA's first impulse was to stand up, and then and there forbid the bans; but she felt so utterly bewildered that she could not be quite sure of herself, and so the minutes slipped by, and, for the present, the opportunity was lost.

The weak-eyed parson ascended to the pulpit, opened his prayer-book, and gave out his text, upon which the elderly portion of the congregation settled itself comfortably for slumber, while the younger seemed intent on surreptitiously kicking its neighbour's shins.

Meanwhile Vera was making up her mind to stay after the conclusion of the service, and find out who had given instructions to publish the bans.

Of course she felt pretty sure it must be Dudley himself; still it would be more satisfactory to make certain on the point, and having done this, she would find her way down into the village, and ask the booking-clerk to take her watch in payment for a ticket to London, or if he did not think the watch worth so much, then to a large town less distance away.

All her suspicions of Dudley returned with added force. She saw that ever since her arrival at the cottage, he had determined to make her his wife, and though he had said no word to her on the subject he had made his preparations with the full assurance of obtaining her consent; yes, and the most terrible part of the matter was that if she remained in his company long he might even end by inducing her to consent!

Since last night Vera had become distrustful of herself, and inclined to overestimate the mesmeristic power Maddox had undoubtedly obtained over her. Her terror of him amounted to an actual panic.

She waited until the sermon was over, and the benediction pronounced; then the choir and

clergyman filed out, and the congregation moved noisily towards the porch.

Vera followed to the vestry, at the door of which she was confronted by a big, burly man who had acted as clerk.

"I want to see the clergyman who officiated at this morning service," she said.

The man looked at her in stolid surprise.

"Mr. Talbot do you mean?"

"I don't know his name; but there was only one who did duty."

"That's our vicar. Well, unfortunately you've just missed him. During the sermon a message had come from a sick woman over in the village that she was dying, and a cart had been sent for him, and was waiting to take him straight there, so the minute he got rid of his surplice he jumped into the cart, and drove off."

Vera's heart sank.

"When do you expect him back?"

"That's more'n I can say; but I should think he wouldn't be long. Still there's no telling, some folks takes such an uncommon long time a-dying. If you'd like to wait for him, why not go and sit in the vicarage till he comes back! Its close by."

Vera grasped the suggestion eagerly. She felt she must see the young parson at all hazards, and tell him the bans were illegal, inasmuch as they had been published without her consent. The vicarage, a little, cold-looking, grey-stone house quite close to the church, was pointed out to her by the clerk, and thither she went.

She was admitted by an elderly female, who to her other qualifications of extreme ugliness and dirtiness added that of deafness; however, she managed in some occult fashion to gather that the young lady wished to wait for her master, and thereupon ushered her into a dismal, and sparsely furnished little sitting-room, where the table was already laid for the mid-day meal, which the poor vicar had had to go without.

There was a little timepiece on the shelf which told her the hour, one o'clock. She watched the hands travel round slowly until they stood at two,

and then she remembered her promise to Mrs. Lewis to be back at the cottage in time for dinner. What would she and Dudley think of her absence — was it possible they might suspect she did not intend to return?

An agony of impatience seized the young girl. When would Mr. Talbot be here? She must not leave until she had seen him, and yet every minute she stayed she ran a certain amount of risk.

Half an hour later she heard the sound of approaching wheels, and went joyfully to the window, thinking they heralded the coming of the vicar. To her horror she saw the little pony and cart from Glen Raron, with Dudley Maddox himself driving!

His quick eye caught sight of her, and a smile of triumph lit up his face. Vera waited for no more, but rushed from the room, along the passage into the kitchen, where the housekeeper stood up and regarded her in amazement, and thence through the open door into a straggling garden, filled with pews and cabbages, which led to the hillside.

Her one idea was flight. Where she was going to she had not the vaguest notion, and she did not much care, so long as she escaped Maddox!

She could not stay to reason, or assure herself that he would hardly have dared to use force to compel her to go back with him. All she knew was he was strong and unscrupulous, and she feared him as she had never feared anyone in her life before.

On she went in a perfect paroxysm of terror, instinctively making her way to a wood which she saw in the distance below her. The trees and bushes would give her a better chance of concealment than this open hillside, if she could only reach it before he followed.

She dared not look behind to find out whether he was coming, since by so doing she would have to slacken her speed. Every nerve was strained in this mad race for something dearer than life. Her feet hardly seemed to touch the grass, so swiftly did they skim over it.

Just here the hill was steep and precipitous, and was, of course, strange land to her. At any other time she would have proceeded with caution, since she knew there were several disused slate and stone quarries about; but now caution was out of the question until she had reached the plantation, and she went blindly on, looking neither to right nor left.

A warning shout behind her—the sound of her own name—only made her strive to quicken her pace, since it told her Maddox was in pursuit. Afterwards she had only a vague idea of what followed, for she had reached the edge of a quarry, and down below she saw the cruel jagged stones, as it seemed, at an infinite distance.

She strove to pull herself up, she made an immense effort, but it was useless. The speed at which she had been running down hill gave her an impetus that carried her forward in spite of her own will, and the next moment she found herself falling.

After that there was an interval of unconsciousness, and when she opened her eyes next, she was lying on the couch in the Glen Ravan sitting-room, Dudley Maddox kneeling at her side, and watching her anxiously, while he moistened her lips with brandy. At a little distance stood Mrs. Lewis, leaning forward in an attitude of attention that made her blindness painfully evident.

"She is all right now," Maddox said, rising, and breathing a sigh of relief. "I am afraid one of the small bones in the foot is broken; but beyond that there is no damage done. It is a wonder, though, for when I saw her first I thought she was killed outright."

Vera herself had almost shared this opinion. She was still giddy, nevertheless she attempted to rise, with the result that she fell back uttering a sharp little cry of pain.

"Ah! I thought so," Dudley remarked, and his supple fingers travelled lightly yet firmly over her stocking foot. "I think I am surgeon enough to set the bone, Aunt Lina, if you will get me some bandages and a couple of splints."

She left the room to obey his wishes, and the younger man added softly to Vera,—

"Is the pain very great?"

"It is, indeed," she returned with a groan, and it must be confessed all other considerations were lost sight of for the moment in acute physical anguish. "It will be worse while the bone is set, won't it?"

"I am afraid so. I shall be as gentle as I can, and you must be brave—unless, indeed," he continued in a half-musing tone, and more to himself than to her, "I give you something that will prevent your feeling any pain at all. Shall I do this?"

"Yes—yes!" she exclaimed, eagerly.

"Very well. Look at me, and don't attempt to remove your eyes."

His tone was commanding—he had drawn himself to his full height—and seemed to be making a supreme effort of will, while his gaze held hers unwaveringly.

He raised his hands and made a few passes with them, with the result that her eyes slowly closed, then tension on the muscles relaxed, and she lay back in a slumber as peaceful and calm as an infant's.

Her weakness from pain had aided Maddox in this first experiment of his, as he had calculated it would.

His eyes grew triumphant at last; his control over her was complete! The rest would be comparatively easy.

Vera's slumber lasted for some hours. When she awoke she was still lying on the couch, her foot neatly encased in bandages, and the pain much less acute than it had been.

The summer air, laden with the perfume of roses, came through the open window, and with it the very faint far-off cadence of church bells.

The sound of the chimes brought back the event of the morning service to her memory, and she realised at the same moment her own helplessness and Maddox's power.

A little exclamation of despair broke from her lips.

"What is the matter?" asked the voice of Dudley himself, and he drew forward the arm-

chair in which he had been sitting close to the head of the couch, watching her while she slept. "Does anything disturb you?"

"It does, indeed," she returned vehemently. "I was in church this morning, when I heard my own bans of marriage read out."

"Well!"

"It was you who caused them to be published!"

"Yes; I admit it. What then?"

"Only this—that no earthly consideration will ever induce me to become your wife—and yet she shivered as she spoke, with a vague fear of her own impotence.

Dudley Maddox smiled—a smile full of subtle meaning. He leaned his elbows on his knees, and, supporting his chin between the palms of his hands, looked at her for a moment before he replied.

"As you have mentioned the subject it may be as well that you should hear my view, Vera," he said gently. "Ever since our first meeting I have loved you, and though you refused me when I offered you my hand I had sufficient confidence in myself to believe that in the end you would give me a different answer."

"I need not remind you of the events that have happened at the Grange, whose effect has been to separate you and Maurice St. John forever; and more than that, to throw you penniless on a world with which you are not fitted to battle."

"Caring for you as I do, it is impossible that I can think of your position without distress; and I am quite sure in my own mind that it will be for your happiness to marry me."

"I am fairly well off, I can give you comforts—luxuries even. I will take you away to the Continent, where your father's name and crime are unknown, and I will make life quite a different thing to what it has ever been before."

"It was under the influence of these considerations that I had the banne of our marriage published, for I felt—and I feel still—that it is for your own welfare as well as my great happiness that we should become man and wife."

His voice sank into a low caressive tone, his handsome eyes softened into liquid tenderness. Verily he was a man whose affection any girl might be proud of winning, and if Vera had never seen Maurice St. John, it is likely enough she might have given him a very different answer.

As it was, her loyalty to her lover was as staunch as if Fate had never come between to separate them.

And yet Maddox's specious eloquence was such that she almost forgot her indignation at his action, in pity for the evident sincerity of his passion.

"I cannot marry you," she repeated.

"You can, and what is more, you will," he replied, quietly and steadily. Then he seized both her hands in his, and his eyes blazed into sudden passion. "You don't understand me, Vera; when I set my heart on a thing I end by obtaining it. All my life I have been successful, and I intend to be in this most important part of it. I would win you by fair means if I could—but fair or foul, I am determined to win you!"

His vehemence, instead of frightening her, had an entirely opposite effect; the fact was that when he lost control over himself he lost it over her as well.

"How dare you say such words to me?" she cried, excitedly. "I will appeal to Mrs. Lewis—she will surely protect me!"

He laughed as if amused.

"Try her and hear what she says. I have already enlisted her sympathies in my behalf, and I doubt whether she will even listen to your objection."

"She would not allow you to do this great wrong!"

"She would not regard it as a wrong; she is of opinion that you ought to be grateful to me for my devotion; moreover, she was brought up in a school where young girls were not allowed to have minds of their own, but obeyed the will of their parents without question. No, Vera, you

may as well make up your mind to the inevitable, you will have to do so in the end."

"You cannot force me against my will!"

"No; but I shall force your will myself. Have I not already shown you how easy it is for me to do it?"

Vera sank back amongst her cushions with a half-articulate exclamation of despair. His very frankness showed her the desperate nature of her case. Instinctively she knew that neither tears nor entreaties would avail her. He had laid his plans with the utmost care and skill, he had brought her to this little out of the way cottage, where no one was likely to trace her; he had counted on her friendless and isolated condition, and he was clever and unscrupulous enough to carry his wicked design to a successful issue. She was absolutely in his power—there was no escape for her.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a strange, little laugh—half-scoffing, half-malignant, that seemed to come from somewhere close at hand, though neither Dudley nor Vera had been its author. They both looked up in surprise, and the former, after a hasty glance round the room, went to the window and looked out.

There was no one visible, except Mrs. Lewis, who was kneeling beside a flower bed tenderly raising the head of a carnation that had been drooping from the effects of the sun.

"Strange!" he muttered, half to himself. "What could it have been?" His face cleared, as a shrill bird-like shriek came from the room above. "It was Aunt Lina's parrot of course—it could have been nothing else."

Nevertheless he was not altogether satisfied with the explanation, for the vindictiveness of the sound he had heard was less bird-like than human.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE DOOMED HOUSE.

AFTER leaving Vera on the eventful night of her father's escape Maurice St. John returned to Evremont Court, in company with Wickham, who was silent and indeed sulky. Caleb Graham had cheated him, and the detective was not a man who cared to own that he had failed. More than this, he was not pleased at Maurice's command that he should give up the search for his former prisoner, who he felt sure must be still lurking somewhere about the Grange. His own opinion was that justice should come first—and justice would certainly not be satisfied if the murderer of Frank St. John were permitted to escape!

Perhaps Maurice himself felt something of this too. As a matter of fact, he was torn with conflicting emotions, and glad enough to escape from the company of the detective to his own room, where he sat miserably enough, in an arm chair, thinking over all that had happened, and much too disturbed to dream of going to bed.

Just as the morning light had forced its way through the drawn blinds, and flooded the room with sunshine, there came a hurried rap at his door, followed by the entrance of Wickham, who looked strangely excited.

"What's the matter?" asked Maurice, raising his heavy eyes in some surprise.

For answer the detective went to the window, and drew back the curtains. The room commanded an extensive view; in the distance could be seen the twisted chimneys and gable ends of Greystoke Grange; and to these Wickham pointed.

"Look, Sir!" he said, and Maurice sprang from his chair, snatching up a pair of field-glasses as he passed a side table, and adjusting them to his sight. A dense volume of smoke rising from amongst the chimneys, and shot through with vivid tongues of flame, told its own tale.

"Good Heavens!" cried the young man, "the Grange is on fire. We must hasten there without a moment's delay. I wonder if the inmates have discovered it."

"My opinion is it contains no inmates at the present moment," rejoined Wickham, drily; but St. John had not heard him, having rushed down:



stairs to give orders that the fire-engine and hose which were always kept at the Court, should at once be got ready, and the swiftest horse in the stables harnessed to the lightest trap meanwhile.

Of course he was under the impression that Vera was still at the Grange, and his mind was in a chaos of terrified apprehension on her account.

In a very few minutes the dog cart was ready, and he in the box-seat holding the reins, while beside him sat Wickham, wondering what would be the upshot of this new development in the Greystoke mystery.

He had heard people talk of "lightning speed," but never until this morning had he realized what it meant.

It was a good thing for both of them that Maurice was used to driving, otherwise at the rate at which they dashed along, they must inevitably have come to grief long before they reached their destination.

At the rusty old lodge gates Maurice sprang out and secured the horse—for he was afraid of taking him nearer the scene of the conflagration—and then he and Wickham hurried along the avenue, and soon stood opposite the Grange, upon which the flames had, by this time, secured a good hold.

Upwards through the dense black columns of smoke they shot into the sky, sending forth showers of sparks as they caught the great wooden beams, or writhing like fiery serpents around the chimneys. There was a light wind blowing, and it fanned the fire into yet fiercer play, while even where the two men stood the heat was driven in scorching waves. It seemed clear that the old house was doomed. Wickham ventured round to the back, while Maurice's eager eyes scanned the windows—especially the ones belonging to Vera's rooms. But no one was visible there, or indeed anywhere about the place, which had every appearance of being deserted.

Nevertheless the young man, with the help of two or three farm labourers, who had gathered round, contrived to rear a ladder against the front of the house and effect an entrance through one of the windows—only, however, to be instantly driven back by dense clouds of suffocating smoke.

"I must try again," he cried, desperately, making ready for a second attempt, when Wickham joined him with the news that the big fire-engine from the county town was dashing along the high road, and would be on the scene in the course of a few minutes. At the same time one of the men who had helped him raise the ladder remarked slowly,—

"If it be the young lady you're a looking for, master, she's gone. I seed her myself coming out of the plantation yonder with a young man, jest as it was a gettin' light, and though she didn't carry her head as high as usual I knowed her in a minit."

This partly set Maurice's apprehensions at rest; he guessed that Maddox had been Vera's companion. But there was not much time for wondering whether they had gone; the engine was now brought to a standstill in front of the house, and the water from the moat pumped up to the flames, on which at first it seemed to have little effect. In this task everyone who could helped, Maurice included; but still the fire crackled on; the smoke rolled in heavy masses on the wind, the beams and ceilings of the upper rooms fell in.

"It's no good thinking to save the house," said one of the firemen; "all we can do is to keep the flames from spreading to the outbuildings."

At last—but not until after the most strenuous exertion—the fire was got under, and not till then did the men cease from their exertions. Maurice, his face all blackened, his hair singed, his attire in disorder, was pretty well exhausted by his labours, and finding there was nothing further for him to do told Wickham that he should go home.

"All right," was the detective's answer, "I'll follow after a bit, but not just yet."

He watched St. John's departure before he said to a fireman near him,—

"What about the cause of the fire—accidental or otherwise?"

"Otherwise," was the laconic response. Wickham nodded intelligently.

"I thought so. It will be interesting to me to go over the place when it is a bit cooler. It strikes me I may discover something that'll prove useful."

The particular fact that he wanted to find out was how Caleb Graham had contrived his escape from the study the night before, and here was his opportunity.

It was late in the evening before he returned to Evremond Court, and when he did so he at once sought Maurice, who saw from his grave face that he had news of importance.

"Well!" he said, interrogatively.

"Well, sir, I have found Mr. Caleb Graham."

Maurice turned a shade paler.

"Alive?"

"No—dead. I found there was a secret passage leading from the study to the rooms above. The book-case was only a blind; on touching a spring, it moved aside, leaving an aperture just large enough for a man to creep through, and that was how my gentleman gave me the slip. It was a very pretty bit of mechanism, the prettiest I ever saw."

"Then Graham did not leave the house last night?"

"It seems not." The detective's face wore a puzzled look, he paused a moment, biting his nails in perplexity. "The fact of the matter is I don't believe we have fathomed the business yet—there are bits of it that won't fit in. I can't understand it myself."

"What can't you understand?"

"Well, I'll explain, sir. Between the study and the room supposed to be immediately above it was a smaller one, not more than five feet high, whose existence you would never have suspected unless you had measured the outside of the house. This was apparently used as a store for all sorts of things, and in it I found the old man's body."

"Then he was burned to death?" asked St. John, in a low tone.

"I suppose so! either that, or suffocated by the fumes of the smoke."

"What a terrible fate!"

"Not worse than he deserved," remarked Wickham, grimly. "But why he should have remained there when it would have been quite easy for him to escape after you and I left the Grange last night passes my comprehension."

"It is strange, certainly," murmured Maurice.

"Besides, the fire was clearly the work of an incendiary. In the back part of the premises we discovered traces of woollen stuffs that had been soaked in paraffin, and more than that, the end of a fuse, which had evidently been timed to smoulder for some time before it finally communicated the flames."

"You think that Graham himself did this?"

"Either he, or someone acting under his orders. The servants have both disappeared, as well as Miss Graham; but where they have gone no one seems to know, though it won't be difficult to trace them later on, I should think. But our discoveries didn't end with the contents of the house. We found something in the moat as well."

Wickham paused impressively, as if to see the effect of his words, and after a minute, added,—

"It was a coffin."

"A coffin!" echoed Maurice.

"Yes, an oak coffin lined with lead. Before opening it we sent for the police, and then we found inside, not a dead body, but a quantity of valuable silver plate, the proceeds of robberies, no doubt."

"Impossible!"

"It's the truth, sir. I told you before I believed Graham to be identical with the old man whom we have wanted so long in connection with the jewel robberies that nobody has been able to get to the bottom of, and now I am sure of it."

"But why on earth should he hide the silver in a coffin?"

"That's more than I can say, unless it was because it had a lead lining, and he calculated

that the water wouldn't be able to get through to damage the "articles."

"And why put it in the moat?"

"Ah, that's easier to explain. The moat was a very good hiding-place, and the chances were fifty to one against its being searched. As it happened, however, the water was nearly all used in extinguishing the fire, and so the coffin became visible. It's a queer history altogether, isn't it, sir?"

"It is indeed," responded Maurice, with a groan; and to think that his pure and beautiful Vera should be connected with this shameful tale of intrigue and crime!

"The question is," pursued the detective after a pause—and he kept his eyes shrewdly fixed on the young man—"what are we to do next?"

Maurice started.

"Is it necessary to do anything?"

"Certainly it is—not on account of your brother, perhaps, but in order to put an end to the gang of which Graham seems to have been the leading spirit. You must remember, sir, that it is to my interest that everything concerning these robberies should be brought to light."

"Certainly," St. John answered with dignity; "but I have nothing at all to do with the matter, and should prefer not to be consulted with regard to it. Caleb Graham and I have settled our account."

He spoke with a certain finality, which he thought would suggest to Wickham the desirability of taking leave, for he was heartily sick of the whole matter.

But the detective showed no symptoms of accepting his dismissal. He still stood, facing Maurice, his brows knitted together, apparently in indecision.

At last he spoke.

"There's one other matter I should like to mention, sir, and it's been puzzling me a goodish bit. Caleb Graham himself confessed that he was your brother's murderer, and if so he must have been identical with the old white-haired lady in the railway-carriage who drugged Miss Vera, and subsequently stabbed Mr. Frank before taking the jewels."

"Well, what has that to do with this business?" Maurice demanded sharply.

"Only this—that the body of the old man found has luxuriant grey hair and beard, which must have taken years to grow to its present length. How was it possible that he could have hidden it all when he assumed feminine disguise?"

How indeed! The question was a pertinent one, as Maurice at once saw.

"Are you sure that the hair and beard were natural growth?" he asked.

"Quite sure. It was the first thing I convinced myself of. Oh! yes, there's no doubt about that. They were both singed with the action of the fire; but they were growing on his head and face beyond all question."

"Then he could not have been the woman in the railway-carriage?"

"It would seem not."

"Unless," added Maurice, "you have made a mistake, and this man you are speaking of is not Caleb Graham at all."

"That also struck me. But he is wearing the clothes in which the old man was dressed when I saw him last; the handkerchief in his pocket is marked 'C. Graham,' and the signet ring on his little finger bears his crest. Besides, in general appearance the two are identical."

"Then perhaps the man who made the confession was not really Graham?"

"But the young lady called him 'father,' and there can be no doubt of her identity."

This was true, and tended still further to complicate the matter. Wickham flattered himself that he could see as far through a stone wall as most people; but here he was obliged to confess himself at fault.

Nor could Maurice give him any assistance. He declared his intention of going over to see the body that had been found in the secret chamber, and the following morning carried this design into effect; but the sight of the dead man told him nothing.

The features were much discoloured, and

shrivelled by the action of the fire, the clothes were partially burned; but the hair and beard certainly were not false, and it seemed quite impossible they could ever have been hidden under a feminine disguise.

So far from the mystery being cleared up it seemed more unfathomable than ever.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

##### THE FORTUNE-TELLER.

VERA took advantage of her hurt foot, and refused to come downstairs for some days; in this way she gained a respite from Dudley's unwelcome attentions, and was also free to plan all sorts of stratagems for making her escape from Glen Ravan.

Unfortunately, however, most of these stratagems had a weak part, and it seemed doubtful whether they would succeed even when she was well enough to try and put them in practice.

Of course while she was lame it was quite useless to think of leaving the cottage, which was securely fastened up every night by Dudley himself, who also kept a very keen look-out during the day.

He did not wish her to regard him in the light of a gaoler, and yet this was what he really was, for he had quite determined that she should not go outside the garden gate until she walked through it with him on her bridal morn.

In all Vera's plans her lack of money was the great difficulty, and she now felt pretty sure that her purse had not been lost, but taken from her in view of this very emergency.

Already she had made one appeal to Mrs. Lewis; but it had been met as Maddox predicted it would be.

The blind lady declared it was absolutely flying in the face of Providence for a girl in Vera Graham's situation to refuse her nephew, and it was clear from her manner that she was ready to uphold him through thick and thin.

Vera grew almost despairing. She was completely in this man's power, and though so far he had only shown her the velvet glove she knew well enough the strength of the iron hand it covered.

At the end of a week her foot had become so much better that she could put it to the ground without difficulty; but she carefully concealed this fact from Mrs. Lewis, who spent a good part of the day with her in her bedroom, and occupied herself chiefly in chanting her nephew's praises.

Vera shrewdly guessed that it was Dudley himself who had suggested her keeping the young girl's company, as, although she could not see, her hearing was so preternaturally acute that no movement on her companion's part would escape her.

The only other occupant of the cottage—Jenny, the maid of all work—was a Welshwoman, who could neither speak nor understand a word of English, and who was moreover, devoted both to her mistress and Dudley Maddox, so that it was quite hopeless for Vera to count on any help from her.

Day after day passed with any change, and then there came a peremptory message from Dudley that she was either to come downstairs or to let him examine her foot to see how it was progressing—the young man had been brought up as a surgeon, hence the knowledge of surgery he possessed.

Once, when speaking of the matter, he told Vera that after walking the hospitals for twelve months he had still been in such horror of the dissecting room that he had thrown up his profession rather than face it. How much of truth there was in this statement she could not tell.

It was Mrs. Lewis who delivered her nephew's message, in reply to which Vera refused to come down, and also refused to allow the examination. Her heart beat anxiously as she heard the blind lady going downstairs, and she wondered what steps Maddox would take to enforce his authority.

Just then there came the very unusual sound of a ring at the bell, and looking out of her window Vera saw in the garden below a man hold-

ing in his hand the orange-coloured envelope that covers a telegram.

"Mr. Dudley Maddox!" she heard him say, and less than ten minutes later Dudley had left the Cottage, evidently in great haste, and jumped in the trap; the messenger had come in from the station. Apparently the despatch, whatever its nature, was of importance, and demanded immediate attention.

Vera found herself wondering who had sent it. Now that she was sure he was out of the house she made up her mind to go down, for she was very tired of the monotony of her bedroom.

She found the sitting-room deserted, Mrs. Lewis being in the garden, while from the kitchen in the rear came the sound of Jenny singing a Welsh air.

The window was open, and Vera's gaze was idly fixed on the geraniums and fuchsias that ornamented the sill, when it seemed to her that from between the leaves she saw two black eyes gazing straight at her. She was just going to call out when a warning finger was held up, and a scrap of paper, wrapped round a stick, fell on her lap.

She opened it in some trepidation, and read these words,—

"There is a summer-house at the bottom of the garden. Come to it, and I will be there."

No signature, and the handwriting disguised.

At first Vera hesitated; but, finally, curiosity overcame her scruples, and she slipped quietly out of the house and across the lawn without the blind woman's hearing her.

The summer-house alluded to was in the remotest part of the garden, and hidden from view of the cottage by a screen of shrubs which shut it in all round.

Vera proceeded slowly, on account of her lameness. The writer of the note was there before her—a dark, round-shouldered woman, with a mat of grizzled grey hair escaping from under a battered-looking hat, a very brown face, and tattered attire, brightened round the throat by a tawny orange neckerchief.

Vera stood at the entrance of the summer-house, and looked at her in amazement.

"So you don't know me? Well, that says much for my disguise."

"Madame!"

"Sh! Come inside and speak in a whisper. That blind woman's hearing is very acute, and I don't want her to suspect anything. Now look at me again, and make sure I am—myself! Sometimes I feel inclined to doubt it."

The last sentence was muttered below her breath.

Vera obeyed. Her disguise was indeed perfect, but the eyes were Adela Graham's—brighter, fiercer than ever. There was a certain haggard wildness in their expression that had not been there before, and the face altogether had aged.

Madame looked like one who has gone through a terrible experience.

"Well, do you recognise me now?"

"Yes, I recognise you."

"And are you glad to see me?"

"I don't know," the girl answered, wearily. "Sometimes it seems to me that I have outlived the power of feeling gladness."

The words appeared to offend Madame.

"You to say that—you, who are young and beautiful and beloved!" she exclaimed, with fierce vehemence. "Ah, what a mockery! Now, if you were in my position you might indeed say them with truth. What would I not give to change places with you!"

She clasped her hands together and sighed bitterly.

Vera made no remark. She was almost afraid to ask what had brought her step-mother hither. A minute later and Madame spoke.

"I suppose Dudley has told you that your father is dead?" she asked, keeping her eyes fixed on the young girl's face.

"He has told me nothing."

"Then you don't know that the Grange is burnt down?"

"No, but I am not sorry to hear it. It was a house full of sinful secrets." Vera shivered, then in a lower voice she added, "When did my father die?"

"The night or morning after you left. The news does not affect you much!"

Vera was silent. It was impossible to her to feign a grief she did not feel, and to pretend to affection for her father's memory would have been sheer hypocrisy.

"Now," added Mrs. Graham, "I want to know how it is I find you here!"

The girl told her without reserve. She did not even conceal the episode of the false banns, or her own anxious desire to escape from Glen Ravan. All the time she was speaking she felt her step-mother's burning eyes fixed on her face; the elder woman followed every word she said with keenest attention.

"You are speaking the truth when you say you do not wish to marry Dudley!" she demanded abruptly.

"The whole truth."

"Then I will do my best to help you." She caught the young girl's wrist and held it firmly. "Listen to me, Vera Graham! If you had married Dudley Maddox I would have killed you! Do you hear I—killed you! And I will tell you the reason why. He is my lover; he ought to become my husband. Your father was an old man; it was out of the course of nature that he should live very long, and I always intended to marry Dudley after his death; yes, and I should have done so if you had not come between us. I see you draw back—you are disgusted at the idea of a woman thinking of a second husband while her first was still alive. Well, I don't want to pose before you as a good woman, and I tell you the truth in order that you may see that I have the most powerful motive for helping you to get away from this place.

"Besides, when I married your father, it was not because I loved him. He was well off at that time, and I was very poor; otherwise I would never have dreamt of becoming his wife. You observe I am frank with you. I have no motive for being otherwise. I will help you, not because I care in the least what becomes of you, but because I am resolved you shall not marry Dudley."

Repulsed as she undoubtedly was by the woman's brutal candour, Vera nevertheless believed that she spoke the truth. She was not surprised at this avowal of her feelings for her cousin—many little incidents in the past tended to confirm it; although, at the same time, there could be no doubt that she had been frantically jealous of her husband's affection for his daughter.

Moreover, Adela Graham had calculated correctly that if she approached the girl with a sympathetic or loving demeanour Vera would at once have doubted her sincerity. The latter knew quite well that her step-mother had always disliked her, and she would have rejected any overtures that might have put her in Mrs. Graham's power. As it was she was inclined to trust her because she openly avowed that she was influenced not by friendly feelings towards herself but by a desire to baulk Dudley Maddox.

"How long have you been in Wales?" she asked.

"For more than a week, and I adopted this disguise because I did not wish to run any risk of being recognised by Dudley. I knew he had relations in this neighbourhood and I rightly guessed I should discover him here. But I was not prepared for finding you with him! I almost betrayed myself one Sunday evening; it was just after your accident. I was outside the window and heard everything that passed between you, but I managed to hide myself in the shrubs before he came out. The question now is—can you get out of this house to-night, while he is still away?"

"How do you know he will be away to-night?"

Madame smiled cunningly.

"I have taken precautions as to that. It was I who caused a telegram to be sent from London demanding his presence there on important business which he dared not neglect, and it is impossible he can arrive here before to-morrow. Still, I have no doubt his aunt and her servant have instructions to lock up the house and secure



the garden door to night—just as he himself was in the habit of doing, so we must make our plans accordingly."

"What do you propose, then?"

"I will tell you," answered madame, who seemed to have thought out and arranged the matter in her own mind beforehand. "I am staying at an old castle about six miles from here. It was a ruin about five years ago; but then an Englishman took a fancy to it, and partly rebuilt it as a country house. He comes there with his family in the summer occasionally, and when he is not there a woman takes care of it for him. It was this woman who gave me information that guided me to Glen Raron. She is very superstitious, and I told her my fortune, and asked her in return for a few nights' shelter. She gave it, and now it happens she is ill, and I am supposed to be nursing and doctoring her. My plan is that you should come to Triasant Castle to-night, and to-morrow we will both go to London."

"I have no money."

"I will provide you with some."

"And I cannot walk six miles with my lame foot."

"The old woman at the castle has the use of a mule. I will bring it over for you."

"Suppose Mrs. Lewis and her maid should sit up to watch to-night?"

"They won't do that, because they will think your lameness would prevent your making an attempt to leave the house. However, I have provided against all contingencies, and if you can't get out of the front door you'll be able to eave by the window."

She took from under her shawl a thick knotted rope with a loop at one end.

"I think I have heard you say you are a pretty good gymnast."

"They used to say so at school."

"Then you'll have no difficulty in lowering yourself from your room, should the necessity arise. Here, take this and hide it somewhere for fear the maid should catch sight of you. Now what do you think would be the best time for me to come?"

Vera considered.

"We go to bed early—a little after ten o'clock—I should think if we said half-past eleven it would be safe."

"Very good. Half past eleven or a quarter to twelve. I will whistle softly when I am ready, and if everything is well, you can throw a stone out of your window on the path below—that will be a sign when the coast is clear. I—"

At this moment the bushes rustled, and Mrs. Lewis appeared.

"Who is that—who speaks?" she asked, excitedly, coming forward in the direction of the voices with her arms outstretched.

"It is I—Vera," answered the girl quickly.

"But you have a companion. I heard the sound of two voices."

"It is a poor gipsy who wanted to tell the young lady her fortune," said madame, with a truly professional whine. "The stare have promised well for her. Her path is strewn with flowers. She will marry, and—"

"Be silent, woman, and leave this place at once!" sternly rebuked the old lady.

Then she turned to Vera.

"How can you be so foolish as to listen to creatures of this description? Surely you are old enough and educated enough to know better. Is she gone?"

"Yes," Vera answered, as madame slipped away.

"Then come back indoors with me at once," continued Mrs. Lewis, taking the young girl by the arm, and partly dragging her forward.

Directly they reached the sitting-room she pulled the bell smartly. It was answered by the maid-servant, to whom she gave instructions in Welsh.

Jenny cast a glance at Vera, and nodded intelligently before she went out into the garden and locked the garden-door, bringing in the key, and giving it into the hands of her mistress.

This action made Vera's heart sink. It told her that though Dudley was absent no precautions for keeping her prisoner were to be neglected.

(To be continued.)

## BRENDA'S GUARDIAN.

—10—

### CHAPTER XXIV.

"BRENDA is missing."

The words rang in Guy Cameron's ears with bitter pain. He knew then all his ward had been to him. Knew that his old trouble in losing Ivy Nairn had been as nothing compared to the agony he felt now.

Mrs. Lennox looked at him in a dazed, bewildered sort of way.

"You cannot mean that this is news to you! Surely Lady Mary telegraphed to you, also!"

"I have been moving about constantly. This business of Tremaine's disappearance seems to have taken up all my time and thought. Of course I will go back to Berkshire at once; but the very idea of Brenda being lost is terrible."

Susan Lennox for once showed herself practical.

"There is no train for three hours. You must have something to eat first, and if you will have it here I can tell you something which may throw light on the mystery. I had thought of writing to Lady Mary, but should far rather tell you. Things put in writing sometimes sound worse than they are, and though appearances may be against my darling I am positive Brenda is innocent of anything but girlish folly."

"Speak out," said Guy Cameron, hoarsely, "half-confidences are useless."

"I know," and in a very few words she told him of Brenda's stolen meetings with John Trelawny.

"She told me she would never willingly see him again after her father's death. I am positive that from the day she heard of her loss her only feeling for Trelawny was aversion; but, Sir Guy, he was a clever, unscrupulous man of the world, and Brenda is heiress to half a million of money. Is it likely he would give her up? Oh, can't you see! Don't you understand? How can I put it plainer?"

"I do understand," said Guy, sadly. "You think Brenda has left her home with him."

"I don't. I could never believe such a cruel slander of the girl I brought up and loved as my own child. I think that Trelawny has threatened to tell you and your mother Brenda is his promised wife; that she, poor child, knowing the sacred way in which you both regard a promise, feared you would force her to keep her word, and so has fled."

"Trelawny is a villain," said Guy, slowly; "but the strangest part is I was coming here solely on his account. I want to tell you we have discovered—Lord Mervin and myself—that his name is not Trelawny at all. The poor young fellow who died at London Tower was Christopher Penfold's nephew. His friend stole his name and inheritance. The man who won Brenda's girlish promise is John Tremaine, a thorough-paced scoundrel, though Sir Marmaduke's brother."

"Then the dying man was not the black sheep everyone tried to make him out? I am glad, Sir Guy. I could not believe a lad with a face like that could be wicked; weak and erring, perhaps, but not wicked."

Sir Guy told her all that had happened at Lynton, and the widow showed an intelligence and ready wit in taking in the details which astonished him.

"It is quite simple," Mrs. Lennox said, gravely; "that scoundrel (I don't know what name to call him by) had but one aim—money. Not content with the Penfold property he wanted more. He got his brother into his power with a view to claiming his estate as heir-at-law. Now finding Sir Marmaduke's friends are making a stir he remembers Brenda's half-million, and tries to make her marry him at once. With the interest of that they could live very comfortably abroad, in some country where extradition treaties are unknown."

Sir Guy looked at her admiringly.

"You have a wonderful head, Susan; but there are two things you forget. First, how are

we to find Brenda; next, positive as we are of his crimes, how are we to bring them home to John Tremaine, alias Trelawny?"

"For Brenda we must wait. To seek her, might only put Trelawny on her track. In the other matter you must offer a reward for the whereabouts of John Tremaine, and then, when you can lay your hand upon him, the real heir to the Penfold property must prosecute him for obtaining the estate under false pretences. There must be plenty of people in England who knew the real John Trelawny without counting the girl he loved. It would be cruel to force her to give testimony."

A telegram brought Lord Mervin to Charing-cross station twenty minutes before Sir Guy's train started. He heard the new complication in events and gave his prompt reply.

"I will instruct my lawyers to-morrow to bring a writ of ejectment (that's not the proper term, but it's near enough,) on Mr. John Trelawny, alias Tremaine, alleging he is not the nephew of the late Sir Christopher Penfold. He can't go on hiding then; he will either have to disgorge his ill-gotten gains or prove that he is the person he pretends to be."

"Have you seen Miss Stuart?"

"Yes; and told her everything. She is thankful to have poor Jack's memory cleared; but I am not to lose her; she says she could not go back to the old loneliness now. We shall be married on the eighteenth of July, as already fixed, and," the peer's voice grew husky, "it won't hurt that poor dear fellow in his far-off grave to know that his Dulcinea is happy. If such things can reach the spirit world I think Jack would be glad his best friend and his life's love were to go through this troublous world together."

It was very late when Sir Guy reached Cameron Castle; Lady Mary looked almost broken down with anxiety, but her first words were,—

"Thank Heaven you are come! Oh! Guy, this is a terrible blow."

Susan Lennox told me all she knew. You must take courage, mother! Brenda has left us, not with a lover, but, as I veritably believe, to avoid one."

Lady Mary listened to his story in breathless interest.

"Can't you get a warrant for the man's arrest?" she demanded, as he finished.

"I believe Lord Mervin's plan, though slower, will be more effectual."

"But Sir Marmaduke!" said Lady Mary. "Guy, don't you see, this wretched man may murder him if you are not prompt!"

"I think the reward offered for John Tremaine's address will help us," said Guy. "When once he is in our power we can make our own terms about his brother. Mother, when I think that my oldest friend has disappeared suddenly in broad daylight, and that my ward has vanished from my own house, it seems to me impossible that this can be the end of the nineteenth century."

"Guy," said Lady Mary, pleadingly, "don't be hard on her when we find her. I never thought I should care much for Brenda. I fancied the memory of her mother would always close my heart against her; but since she has left us I feel as if I had lost a child of my own. She is so young, Guy, you must make allowances for her and forgive her."

"There is nothing to forgive," said Guy, sadly. "When I think of how she must have suffered in secret before she made up her mind to risk all and take refuge in flight I feel as if I had failed grievously in my care of her, or I must have guessed her trouble and got her to confide in me."

The Camerons would have said when they went to bed in the small hours of the morning that they could never be surprised again. Events had poured down upon them so fast in the last few weeks that it really seemed as though Fate could have no further shocks in store for them; but among the pile of letters the butler brought in when they sat at breakfast was one which simply electrified Sir Guy. He ran his eye down it quickly, and then turned to his mother with the one word,—

"Found!"  
"Brenda!" cried Lady Mary, anxiously; "the dear child! Where is she? I must go to her at once."

"Not Brenda," breathed Sir Guy, sadly, "but one whose fate has troubled us sorely of late—Marmaduke Tremaine."

He read the letter to his mother, it was from a certain Dr. Avondale, who kept a small private lunatic asylum not many miles from Bournemouth. Besides ten patients, whose friends paid handsomely for their support, the doctor received four others of a humbler class, for whom a much smaller charge was made, in consideration of their assisting the head gardener, and otherwise making themselves generally useful.

"On the last day of May," wrote Dr. Avondale, "a man was brought here by his wife and her brother, who professed to have heard a great deal of the establishment, and to be most anxious for their afflicted relative to be received as one of the humbler patients."

"The account they gave of themselves was that the patient—John Smith—had been valet and body-servant to Sir Marmaduke Tremaine, Baronet, but that the sudden disappearance of his master had completely turned his brain, and he had now forgotten his own identity, and believed he himself was the missing baronet, and that his wife and her brother were keeping him in duress vile to prevent his returning to his home."

"The certificate of insanity was in perfect form; it was signed by two doctors, and the story, strange as it was, contained in it no impossible detail."

"Mrs. Smith explained that her husband had broken his arm and sustained other injuries while struggling to escape from his home. He was, she declared, dangerous to himself and others. If Dr. Avondale declined to receive him he must go to the pauper asylum."

The doctor explained in his letter that though he thought the woman both callous and unfeeling he never doubted their story. A month of constant intercourse with the patient had, however, convinced him of two things, "John Smith" was a gentleman, and used to good society; also, save on the point of his own identity, he was perfectly sane.

Grave doubts were beginning to assail Dr. Avondale, when he heard by accident that Sir Marmaduke Tremaine had disappeared one week, day for day, before "John Smith" arrived at the Nest.

As Mrs. Smith had declared her husband to have been deranged for months, as in one short week no servant could have despaired of his master's return, and as in many other respects, the data of Sir Marmaduke's loss completely contradicted Mrs. Smith's story, Dr. Avondale began to feel he had been imposed upon.

He asked his patient for the name and address of any friend who would confirm his own story, and wrote at his request to Sir Guy, urging him to come to the Nest at once.

Sir Guy needed no persuasion. As fast as train could take him he travelled, and reached the Nest early in the afternoon. A very few words with the doctor convinced the latter he had been the victim of a very clever fraud. And in less than half an hour Sir Marmaduke was driving off with his friend; a little paler, a little graver and older than he had seemed before that terrible visit to Penfold Manor, but—a free man.

A generous bribe secured a railway carriage to themselves, and Guy soon learned the whole story. Sir Marmaduke bore no ill-will to Dr. Avondale. He declared the story trumped up by his foes sounded so natural it might have deceived anyone. He had been treated with the greatest kindness at the Nest, only the imprisonment, the being surrounded by lunatics, and treated as one had tortured him almost beyond endurance.

"And John Trelawny?" said Guy Cameron.  
"I never saw him—never once. His two friends of coloured servants did the work; but I have thought over things till I can piece the story together pretty well. The man who died at London Tower was the real Trelawny. My brother stole his name. Don't you under-

stand, Cameron! He dared not see me, I should have exposed his plot."

Sir Guy told of his own share in the search for Sir Marmaduke, and the extreme doubt whether the bank or the baronet would stand to lose the sums paid to the presenter of the forged cheques.

"I shan't worry over the money, though it will make so much less for me to leave my boy. I've felt lately, Cameron, I'd give every penny I possessed in the world just to be a free man. Odd, when that pretty ward of yours told me how she feared and distrusted Trelawny it never dawned on me the trick my precious brother had played."

"You will prosecute him, I hope," said Sir Guy. "Surely, Tremaine, no fear of disgrace to your good old name ought to prevent such a villain getting the punishment he deserves."

"I shall prosecute Milroy," said Sir Marmaduke, gravely. "It was he who presented the cheques; he who got me shut up in the asylum. Cameron, I can't tell you the loathing I have for that man; his dark mocking face was like a fiend's. I used to see it in my dreams, and I can tell you it almost frightened me."

Only when they were driving to Cameron Castle did Sir Guy mention Brenda's loss. He was not prepared for its effect on his old friend.

"Heaven help her, poor child, if she is in that villain's power, for he has a wife already!"

#### CHAPTER XXV.

THE advertisement offering a reward for John Tremaine's address had been inserted daily without evoking the slightest reply, when one morning a slight delicate-looking woman quietly dressed in black presented herself in Pump Court and asked to see Mr. Carlyle.

"He will not know my name," she told the clerk, in reply to his question; "please tell him I have come about the advertisement."

"Show her in at once," said the solicitor, promptly, when this message reached him. "Don't go, Sir Guy, you have as much at stake as anyone in this matter."

But Cameron started when the "lady" entered and he recognized Brenda's late maid, the daughter of his old housekeeper.

"Alice!" he exclaimed in amazement.

"I am glad you are here, Sir Guy," she answered respectfully, "because you know something of my history, and will, perhaps, convince Mr. Carlyle of my good faith. I cannot give you John Tremaine's present address, sir," she said, turning to the lawyer, "but he is in England. Some days ago I had a letter from him saying he was coming to Cameron Castle to claim me; I left at once, throwing up a good situation to avoid him. I don't know where he lives in England, or what name he goes by; he married me as John Tremaine, but he has had several aliases since. In one of them he served a term of imprisonment at the Cape."

"He married you?"

"Yes, sir. Sir Guy Cameron knows that when I entered his ward's service I was separated from my husband. I did not tell him my married name, because the Tremaine family were old friends of his, and I thought he would deem it a liberty for me, a poor servant, to have married into it. For the same reason I never told my story to my husband's brother, Sir Marmaduke; I wanted nothing from the Tremaines, I had suffered so terribly during my married life that all I asked was peace and freedom to earn my bread honestly."

"But Mrs. Tremaine," said the lawyer gravely, "if you do not know your husband's address why have you come here about the advertisement?"

"I do not want the reward, sir, it would seem to me like blood money, but when I saw your advertisement it came into my head that perhaps John was going to be married again, and knowing that while I lived no other woman could be his wife I thought I'd come and warn you that he was not free."

"But Alice," interposed Sir Guy, "you must let me speak to your husband's brother, I am sure he would provide for you."

She shook her head.

"I could take nothing from a Tremaine, sir; I am only a servant, though my poor mother gave me a good education. When I saw the advertisement I felt sure that sooner or later, Mr. Carlyle would find my husband, and I thought most likely John had injured him."

"He has injured some of my clients past forgiveness," replied Carlyle, "the law will have to deal with him."

"That's it, sir; you'll have the upper hand of him when he's found, and be able to make your own terms. Sir, couldn't you make a stipulation that he's to leave me in peace and never molest me again? I'd sooner throw myself into the river than go back to him."

Sir Guy interposed.

"I don't think Tremaine ever meant to claim you, Alice. The letter which so terrified you was sent with the design of getting you away from Cameron Castle. It did not suit your husband for you to be there."

"Why should he mind, sir?"

"Because the girl he sought to deceive was there. How could he bring pressure to bear on Brenda Hazelmere to marry him when you, his lawful wife, were actually under the same roof?"

"Miss Brenda!" exclaimed Alice; "that explains a great deal. He was on the steamer when we were leaving Cape Town, but after he saw me he disappeared. Miss Brenda! he might have left her alone, he had done harm enough already."

"Trust me, Mrs. Tremaine," said Mr. Carlyle, kindly, "if any terms are made with your husband, your absolute freedom shall be one of the conditions; but there are so many charges against him I believe myself the law must take its course."

Alice shook her head.

"He'll never be taken to prison alive, sir. You see he 'did' some time in Cape Town, so he knows what prison means. He'll never be taken alive. Long ago he used to keep the means of escape always ready. You may be sure he does still. Milroy's with him in England. I met him at a street corner last week."

"Is Milroy a coloured servant?"

"He's a Malay, sir. I don't know if he's John's servant, or partner, or friend; but any way he's his evil genius. I don't think, bad as he is, John Tremaine would have gone the lengths he has without Milroy to help him."

"What is he?" asked Guy Cameron, with interest. "What did he do for a living?"

Alice shook her head.

"Before he was so much with English people he was a magician. He sold charms and spells. After he was educated his own countrymen would have nothing to do with him and he went in for chemistry and that sort of thing. If there's such a thing nowadays, gentlemen, as evil spirits walking the earth in human form why then one inhabits Osmar Milroy's body. His sister's bad enough, but then she's just a tool in his hands."

Alice had risen up. Sir Guy stopped her kindly by the question, What was she doing? Would she like Lady Mary to help her to another situation?

"I'm making children's clothes, Sir Guy, and getting on nicely, thank you all the same."

Not till Alice Browne had left the office did Guy notice that she had never asked after Brenda, never sent a message to the young mistress she had professed to love.

"Well," said Carlyle, slowly, "what next?"

Sir Guy shook his head.

"Lord Mervin has a private detective watching Penfold Manor. As soon as Tremaine ventures there he will be served with the notice of ejectment. Of course he can't withstand it. There are dozens of people who know poor Trelawny well whom we can bring forward to witness against his supplanter. Sir Marmaduke intends taking the whole loss of the forged cheques on himself, and letting his brother and the accomplice go free, on condition that they leave England for ever. Lord Mervin is made of sterner stuff, and says he will prosecute Tremaine with all the rigour of the law. He can't forgive the wrong done to his dead friend Trelawny."



"And all this brings me no nearer to finding my ward, Carlyle; when I think that Brenda Hazelmere, with her youth and beauty, her utter ignorance of the world, is alone in London, I feel almost disheartened."

"Miss Hazelmere had money in her purse, and she could count on an affectionate welcome at any time from Mrs. Lennox. Painful as the suspense must be to you, Sir Guy, you must take comfort from this thought. If Miss Hazelmere were in any real trouble, if she needed a friend, she would certainly go to her second mother, the woman who brought her up."

An invitation came to Guy Cameron at this time, which little as he felt inclined for social festivities, he could not bring himself to decline. It was to attend the wedding of Dulcie Stuart and Lord Mervin as groom's man. He was also begged to pay a visit to Mrs. Lennox previously and make the acquaintance of the bride.

Dulcie was quite alone. She received him with warm cordiality; and while he was wondering whether or not to touch on the past, she solved the doubt by going to the point herself.

"Lord Mervin tells me we owe it to you that we know the truth at last," she said, simply. "Sir Guy, if you could realise the half of what I suffered while I believed the man at Penfold Manor to be Jack Trelawny, you would understand that I must be grateful to you all my life."

"I think I do understand," he said, gravely. "It is less pain to think of him as at rest and sleeping peacefully amid the blue gum trees of South Africa than to feel that he is alive, but deteriorated to such a point as to be but the wreck of his former self. Miss Stuart, you must let me congratulate you. You were the one love of poor Trelawny's life, and now you are going to marry a man as good and true as any I ever met."

She bowed her head. "I don't think it would pain Jack, if he knew," she said, gently, "and we shall both of us remember him always. Sir Guy, I have heard something of your own anxieties. May I speak one word of hope to you? We are told that a special blessing follows the merciful. Your ward's last act in her African home was to show kindness and hospitality to a dying stranger. I can't believe but that a blessing would follow her for her goodness to Jack Trelawny."

The wedding was very much like other weddings, a much grander ceremony than either bride or groom desired, because Dulcie's sister loved display.

Lord and Lady Mervin were to be absent for a very long honeymoon. The lawyers had decided they could manage the case against John Tremaine without their client's presence, and so Claude was taking his bride to South Africa that she might see for herself the last resting-place of the lover of her youth.

Lord Mervin was not sorry that Dulcie should be far away when the prosecution of John Tremaine began.

He knew his wife's name must be on people's lips in connection with the man whose name and position Tremaine had stolen, and careful of Dulcie's comfort in all things he decided to remain abroad at least three months.

The detective watching Penfold Manor could bring little satisfactory news to his employer. Neither John Tremaine nor Milroy had been seen in the neighbourhood. The house was entirely shut up, with the exception of one room, where the coloured servant, Sonna, lived like a faithful watch-dog to guard her master's home.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

IVY HAZELMERE—to call her by the name she had not borne for years—watched by her child till Alice returned with the doctor.

His verdict was prompt and decided. Miss Norton—Alice had given the old name—was suffering from a terrible shock. Brain fever would probably supervene, and she would have a hard struggle for her life. The greatest care, the most patient nursing, would be required, and he earnestly advised them to send her to a hospital.

Left alone with their unconscious charge the two women looked at each other. Then Ivy told her story. Many years ago, in a moment of pique, she had left her husband, and ever since been out of home and child. Now, to-night, after long years, her little girl had come back to her.

"My child shall never go to a hospital," she said, eagerly, "I have saved a little money. I used to think it would bury me. I will spend all that, and—"

"Miss Brenda gave me her purse just before she began to ramble in her talk," said Alice, "she wanted me to take care of it. I think we might spend her own money on getting the things she will want if we have not enough without, and surely she will have a better chance if she is nursed here by people who love her dearly than in the wards of a crowded hospital, where she would be but one case among many."

So it was settled. Mrs. Fox, finding the money was secure, and there was not the least fear of infection, waxed amiable, and did her best to help the self-appointed nurse. Through those summer days it really seemed as though the inmates of Vine Cottage were quite cut off from the world, and all their thoughts and interests were centred in the one small room where Brenda Hazelmere was fighting her battle with death.

It was a terrible illness. She had been harassed with the burden of a secret for weeks and months. Really, she had never had a mind at ease since her lover first induced her to meet him secretly unknown to her father. That year had been one of terrible excitement, her love affair and its terrible weight of fear, anguish, and remorse, her father's death, the voyage to England, and entire change of life, her painful effort to keep her secret, her instinctive dread that the Camerons might discover it and drive her from their home.

Altogether it made up a tale of trouble heavy enough to have crushed a fragile girl to the earth without the last blow of all, Trelawny's appearance at the Castle, and his terrible threats.

"There is something on her mind," said Dr. Scott, one day after he had been visiting his patient, "it is anxiety, as much as illness which we have to fight against now, the fever is gone, and the chief thing is to get up her strength; but she does not seem to have the least desire to recover. She is so weak she will slip through our fingers yet if we are not careful."

Very early in the days of Brenda's return to consciousness she had learned that it was her mother who watched over her. Ivy made her confession to her child very simply.

"I loved your father, Brenda, as my own soul; but I went to him with broken vows upon my conscience. I had forsaken Guy Cameron for him, and yet he never forgave me for it. It was as though he could never trust me. And I—I was young and proud. I believed he could not live without me, and that if I left him it would bring him to my feet, that in a few days I should be brought home again and be more loved than ever."

"Brenda, he never sought me. He left me to abide by my own rash act. I sent him letter after letter, but no answer ever came; then I heard Kenneth had broken up our home and gone abroad. I knew then that while life lasted I should be alone."

"Never alone again while I live, mother," said Brenda; "we have both made a terrible muddle of our life, and no one wants us, but we will love each other all the more."

"Darling," said the woman, who had suffered so much, "your story is not like mine. You have broken no vows; you have never forsaken a poor man for a richer one. You are the heiress of immense wealth, and of a grand old name, you can't stay here in a humble lodging."

"I don't think I shall stay anywhere long, dear mother, I feel so ill—the doctor is always scolding me for not getting better—he can't guess that I only want to die."

"Why do you want to die?" demanded her mother; "you are so young, dear, and life holds so much for the young."

"If I were dying Sir Guy would forgive me," sobbed Brenda, the tears stealing between her thin fingers down her white cheeks; "if I were

dying, mother, he would come to say good-bye."

"And what would you tell him, Brenda?"

"I should tell him that I only went away because I could not bear to think he would despise me. I should tell him I never really loved Trelawny. His handsome face took my girlish fancy, but I never loved him, even in the old days when I believed in him."

"And then you would go back to Cameron Castle?"

"Sir Guy would not wish it, mother, and I could never leave you."

"I shall not be here long, darling. Trouble and hard work have aged me before my time; even the happiness of having my child will not give me new life. Very soon, Brenda, I shall be with your father in a world where the clouds which marred our love will melt, and all misunderstanding be removed."

Brenda was crying quietly to herself. She was worse the next day, decidedly worse, the doctor said, and the following morning brought no better report.

Alice Browne decided to take the law into her own hands. Knowing that Sir Guy Cameron was in London she got his address from Mr. Carlyle, and presented herself in his private sitting-room.

"Mrs. Tremaine! Is there anything the matter? What can I do for you?"

"Nothing for me, Sir Guy—but I want to speak to you about Miss Brenda."

"Miss Brenda!" a strange light came into his eyes, "is it possible you can tell me where to find her?"

"She has been with me, Sir, ever since she left the Castle. I had sent her my address, and she came straight to my poor lodging; then she had brain fever, and was terribly ill."

"You should have sent for me."

"I dared not, sir. There was a Mrs. Nairn lodging in the house who helped me to nurse Miss Brenda. She told me she was her mother. I who had been bred up at Cameron Castle knew that Miss Brenda's mother had wronged you cruelly, Sir Guy. I guessed you would part her from her child."

"I am not a barbarian," said Sir Guy, bitterly; "tell me how is Brenda?"

"The fever has left her. The doctor says she has only to get well. But day by day she gets weaker instead. It's just as though she were fading out of life, because she didn't care to stay in it, and last night she told me when I was quite sure she was dying I was to send for you to say 'Good-bye.' She is not dying yet, Sir Guy, though she seems terribly near it, but it came into my head, if you could help her to die easily a sight of you might make her want to live."

Sir Guy had risen and taken up his hat.

"Not now," said Alice; "wait till this evening when Mrs. Nairn is going out. Since Miss Brenda's been out of danger she has persisted in doing her work again, and to-night she is going to take home a parcel of things she has finished; come about seven."

"You have given me no address."

"Vine Cottage, Hamwynd-road; Sir Guy, if you come be gentle with my young lady. John Tremaine has done her harm enough. Don't reproach her that for a few weeks she was taken with his handsome face."

"You need not fear," said Guy Cameron, gravely. "My ward will have no reproaches from me."

It was but a week after Dulcie's wedding. Sir Guy wondered what the happy pair were doing as he drove through the unlovely streets of Walworth and Camberwell.

He dismissed his cab at the corner of Hamwynd road, and knocked at the door of Vine Cottage, five minutes after Mrs. Nairn had started.

It was Alice Browne who answered him, leading the way to the room where Brenda, fully dressed for the first time, lay on the hoistly couch lent by the landlady for her convalescence.

"I have brought a friend, dear Miss Brenda," and then she went out and left them together.

And somehow when Brenda looked into Guy's face all fear of him died out of her heart; she put out her thin white hand, and said wistfully,

"I have wanted you so."  
They had never been lovers in those spring days at Cameron Castle; they had never even seemed close friends, and yet it was surely a lover's voice that bent over Brenda, calling her his own, his darling.

"I thought you would forgive me when I was dying," she said, sadly; "but, Guy, I'd like to live a little longer just to prove I was not such a very wilful ward after all."

Guy Cameron's arms were round her and her head rested on his shoulder, as he answered,—

"You are not dying, Brenda; I will dispute the possession of you with Death himself. Oh, my darling, won't you try and get better for my sake?"

"But you were always trying to get rid of me; you wanted me to marry Mr. Ainslie."

"I didn't; I wanted to keep you with me only I felt bound to give Ainslie a fair hearing."

"And you will really let me go back to the Castle even though—"

"Brenda, because for a few weeks you fancied yourself in love with a villain who consummate art might well blind an inexperienced girl, is no reason for me to judge you, but you must only come back to Cameron Castle on one condition, 'that you come back as my wife. I never thought my pride would suffer me to propose to an heiress, but, Brenda, sweetheart, love is stronger than pride.'"

"And you really love me?"

"Better than anything else in life. Yes," as he noticed a questioning glance in her sweet eyes, "better than I loved the chosen of my youth. I see you have heard something of my story. It is quite true that long ago I hoped your mother would be my wife. In the last letter he ever wrote me, Brenda, your father said he was sending me the most precious thing he had—his little girl. Brenda, I think he must have guessed I should love you, and I believe he would be glad to think his child had healed the old wound."

Brenda looked up at him anxiously.

"Guy, she is here, my mother."

"I know."

"She nursed me in my illness; she is old, and sad, and troubled. Guy, I shall never give her up again."

"I will never ask it, Brenda. When once you are my wife Lady Hazelmere shall be welcome to our home."

Lady Hazelmere! The woman who had lived for years in one room and slaved at a sewing machine.

She was coming in even then; her eyes met Guy's. He started. Was it possible this was the ideal of his boyhood? Why she looked years older than he did.

"You have come to see Brenda," she said, quietly.

"Brenda has promised to be my wife. I have reason to know her father would have given her to me gladly. Will you consent, too?"

"I shall feel it the greatest happiness I could know," she answered.

Sir Guy was not selfish; he remembered Susan Lennox and her patient quest, and he went to Turner-street on leaving Vine Cottage to tell her the great news and how she could go and see her cousin Ivy the next day.

Mrs. Lennox was at Vine Cottage early, but another guest had been even earlier. The revelation of happiness—the shock of unexpected joy had done what years of loneliness and grief had not accomplished.

Ivy, Lady Hazelmere, lay dead, with an expression of radiant peace on her still face. The faithful Susan shed some kindly tears as she gazed on all that remained of what had once been the bright companion of her girlhood; but she knew too much of Ivy's sad history not to be thankful that, "after life's fitful fever," her cousin slept well.

There was no inquest; the doctor who attended Brenda testified that Mrs. Nairn had suffered from heart disease, for which he had prescribed for her several times; and he had no hesitation in certifying that to be the cause of death.

Mrs. Lennox took Brenda back with her to the

little house in Turner-street; Alice remained at Vine Cottage.

And there—to the amazement of Brenda and Mrs. Lennox—she elected to stay after the funeral. She firmly refused the least assistance from Sir Marmaduke Tremaine, declaring she should never bear her husband's name, and so she would take aid from no one connected with him. She and Mrs. Nairn had had together quite a number of customers, and she was sure she could earn enough for her wants.

The day after Mrs. Nairn's (Lady Hazelmere's, that is,) death, there was a terrible railway accident, and among the passengers killed on the spot were Osman Milroy and John Tremaine. They were cut off suddenly, without time even for a prayer, and they carried with them many guilty secrets.

Lord Mervin, who was cabled to for instructions, ordered that the case should be proceeded with only sufficiently to prove that the man who had taken possession of Penfold Manor was not Jack Trelawny. He wanted no penalties; he was anxious to bring no shame upon Sir Marmaduke, but for the sake of the friend of his youth he desired that the whole world should know the man who, for so brief a time, ruled at Penfold Manor was an impostor.

Widowhood made no difference to Alice Browne's desire to remain at Vine Cottage, and Brenda Hazelmere, finding her mind was made up, ceased to argue with her.

Lady Mary Cameron was delighted with her son's engagement; he and his wife would live chiefly at Hazelmere, and she would be installed as a kind of vice mistress at the Castle. It was her own idea to offer a home there to Mrs. Lennox, and Susan who, her quest ended, was finding Kennington a strangely dreary place, thankfully accepted it.

Guy Cameron urged that her mother's recent death need not defer Brenda's wedding. To the world Lady Hazelmere had been dead for many years, and they had no thought of tearing away the veil of silence time had cast over her memory.

And Brenda, who knew how much her mother had rejoiced at her engagement, did not oppose Guy's pleadings.

They were married at Hazelmere one bright September day, and Sir Marmaduke Tremaine gave away the bride.

Even outsiders saw a certain fitness in Guy Cameron's old disappointment being atoned for by the child of the woman who had caused it, while those who knew the happy pair best were well aware that he loved Brenda far more dearly than he had ever loved Ivy Nairn.

Lord and Lady Mervin stood by Jack Trelawny's grave, where a marble cross, erected by Claude's orders, now marked his name and age. Dulcie's eyes filled with tears as she thought of Jack's lonely life, but she knew full well how hard is the upward path for those the world considers prodigals; and she knew in her heart Jack was happier sleeping beneath the African sunshine than ever he had been in England.

"I am glad we have seen his grave together," she told her husband; "I shall always feel now that he—"

Lord Mervin finished the sentence.

"That he knows I have won the treasure he most desired. Heaven grant, my darling, that I may be able to make you happy!"

And soon after that they went home to England, and the first visit they paid there was at Hazelmere, where it seemed to Dulcie perfect contentment and delight had dawned for—

BREND A'S GUARDIAN.

[THE END.]

MANY of the fruits and vegetables now eaten in England were almost unknown to our forefathers. Not until Henry VIII.'s time were either raspberries, or strawberries, or cherries grown in England, and we do not read of the turnip, cauliflower, and quince being cultivated before the sixteenth century, or the carrot before the seventeenth century.

## STRAYED AWAY.

—201—

### CHAPTER XXIX.—(continued).

PERCY was no better than other men. He allowed himself considerable latitude, and was by no means averse to a flirtation when opportunity offered. He was not the most desirable acquaintance for a confiding husband with a wife inclined to coquetry. He was not the safest companion for a simple-minded girl, and there was much in his past life of which he ought to have repented—of which he would, perhaps, have repented, if men were not, to a certain extent, privileged in moral laxity by a species of respectable cant that condones the sin, while it admits the sinner into society. The best of men is not too good, and yet the worst of men is, by a peculiar process of reasoning, considered worthy of the purest woman.

Mr. Falkland shut his eyes to his own faults, that were actual faults. Sunk out of the way some inconvenient memories that would have suggested to him to judge gently on the principle of fairness, lest he should require gentle judgment. He thought only of Fanny's indiscretion, and condemned it as something worse than indiscretion.

"I was away too long," he thought. "I tried her patience too severely, and it would not stand the test. All women are coquettes at heart. I almost deserve my disappointment, for being dull enough to believe in the faith and purity of any one after my experience of the many."

The narrow-minded, selfish egotism of the man peeped out here—the wretched misjudgment that came of hollow observation and one-sided knowledge picked up in evil places.

He did not reason as he might have reasoned on the circumstances that threw Fanny in Mr. Wilson's way. He blamed her entirely, making no allowance for the equivocal position in which he himself had placed her. He did not know whether Fanny had given Arthur permission to kiss her; he looked only at the kiss—and to him it was an all condemning evidence of guilt.

"It is in them," he muttered, with the bitter meanness of jealousy. "It was my fault, for throwing myself away upon a poor man's daughter, in the fond belief that I could raise her to my own level. It was a foolish fancy. The common taint cannot be rooted out. A lady would have had more self-respect. She was flattered by the notice of this fellow, because he has the dress and manners of a gentleman. I have paid dearly for my error."

Percy went down to Penge at once. The bitterness of separation wore away as he went on, and he could contemplate the idea with more philosophy. He liked to play the aristocrat, and he was aware that the well-trained cynicism of the aristocrat would not permit the emotions to be disturbed in such a matter.

He was not disposed, on consideration, to be sentimental over it. Gentlemen of the school the builder's son tried to imitate were never sentimental in anything.

"She may be guilty, and she may be innocent," he reflected, while the cab that he had hired in Piccadilly rattled on with him. "Women can go very far indeed in trifling before they descend into actual sin, but a husband's honour is not worth much in the hands of a married coquette. Ladies who find a gentleman friend necessary to their intellectual comfort should never marry. I am not an advocate of sentimental friendship—in others."

That remark expressed with tolerable accuracy man's selfish faith in himself, and his selfish doubt of the rest of the world.

His appearance at Penge was quite unexpected, and the elder Falkner welcomed him with an inward misgiving. There was a guest in the drawing-room when he arrived—a really beautiful and brilliant girl, who was playing the piano with a grace and feeling that Percy had never heard surpassed, and he was passionately fond of good music.

He was very tired, and did not enter the



drawing-room at first. He wanted to have some conversation with his father, and he did so after his mother and sisters had flocked out to see him.

"Who was that playing?" he asked his youngest sister, rather abruptly she thought.

"Oh! that's Adela—Adelaide Millard. You will be charmed with her. Will you come in presently?"

"I am too tired to dress, Amy."

"Come as you are, then."

The girls had made the most of their handsome brother in his absence, and were anxious to show him off to their guest.

"Perhaps I will," he said, with a suppressed sigh, "but I want a few words with father."

"Is anything wrong in the business?" inquired the elder Falkland when they were alone. Percy's knitted brow rather alarmed him.

"Nothing. But you have seen Kirby, I presume?"

"Yes, he came here," said the builder in a tone of deprecation. "You were wrong to serve him so badly, Percy. He only acted in accordance with my instructions."

"You had better have left me to my own business. I don't know how much I have to thank you for, in the way things have gone. However, it is over now, as far as I am concerned, and you must manage the rest."

"Has anything gone wrong?"

"Everything. I suppose you are aware that the girl has never seen her parents since I went away?"

Falkland the elder muttered something about the girl's foolish obstinacy, and tried to justify himself for the deceit he had practised.

"I made a fair provision for her," he said, somewhat surprised at the cool decision with which Percy talked of the affair, "and it is her own fault if she kept wilfully out of the way."

"Possibly. But we need not discuss that now. I want that sixty pounds a year settled upon her, so that there may be no risk of her being deprived of it at any time. And there is a child to be provided for. I believe she can legally keep possession of him till he is seven years of age, and then he must be taken away and properly educated. In the meantime I shall require to see him occasionally."

"And you expect me to arrange this," said Mr. Falkland, arching his brows in surprise.

"I do; unless you would rather that I arrange it myself. But I desire to drop all further intercourse with her personally."

"That is wise and proper, Percy. I am glad you have seen your error."

"No sermons, please," said the young man, impatiently. "The girl has chosen to throw away her chance of happiness, and I do not care to say how much of mine is gone with it. May I depend upon you to do what I require?"

"If you think it your duty to do so much."

"I am sure it is. The child is mine, and I am answerable for his future. There is no casting sentiment in the matter."

"But consider," urged the father, "what a barrier the child will be in your way."

"How?"

"In your prospects of a good marriage."

Percy laughed bitterly.

"I am quite safe in that respect. And if you will kindly give Mr. West his daughter's address, 26, Maple-street, Pimlico, and tell him to fetch her home at once, you will be doing her a service; the old man will bless you in the fulness of his heart, and you will keep her out of my way."

Falkland did not like his son's bitter levity of tone; but he said nothing in rebuke.

"Only," he urged, as a last remonstrance, "no lady would think of receiving your attentions if you acknowledge that child."

"Should I ever trouble a lady with my attentions she will receive them and me with all the faults I have or may acquire. And you need not be alarmed. The gentler sex are as merciful to us as they are merciless to each other. There are few women who would refuse me as I am, even with all my sins upon my head."

He left the builder to reflect over that wretched bit of cynicism, and retired to the dressing-room. In half-an-hour he was standing by the piano,

assisting Miss Millard over her music with an *empressment* that was an instinct with him when he was in the company of a young and lovely woman.

Miss Millard was a blonde—beautiful, and conscious of her beauty. She knew the witchery of her velvet eyes, the power of her smile, the effect of the fair, golden hair that fell in feathery showers on her white shoulders. She could coquet even with the little supple hands that flashed and floated over the piano.

Percy forgot much of his bitterness against the sex in general, and poor Fanny in particular, while he was by Miss Millard's side.

"I made a mistake," he thought, when the evening was over, and he had seen the lady to her brougham. "I went out of my way to pick up a half-taught girl because she was proud and pretty. I am fettered to her for life, and must pay the penalty. Adelaide Millard is the woman I should have chosen, had I had sense enough to wait."

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE SICKNESS OF DESPAIR.

How long Fanny lay in that deep swoon she did not know, but when she came to her senses she was lying on the sofa, and Mrs. Naylor was bending over her.

Little Polly was there too, faithful to her charge; and baby, in happy ignorance of his mother's misery, was crowing merrily at the noise made by his rattle.

Fanny, proud even in her sorrow, said nothing in reply to the landlady's curious questions as to the cause of her illness. She said it was a sudden faintness—nothing more.

"I thought, to be sure, something dreadful had happened," said Mrs. Naylor, with loquacious kindness, "when Polly came up to see if you wanted her, and found you lying on the floor. We had quite a job to get you on to the sofa."

"You are very kind, but I am quite well now. I felt faint and fell. I thank you very much for coming to attend me."

"Would you like anything sent for?"

"No, thank you."

Mrs. Naylor saw by her lodger's tone that she desired to be alone. The woman retired, taking Polly with her. The Maple-street landlady was keen enough to associate Fanny's illness with the visit of the handsome gentleman who had sat in her parlour and made so many inquiries about the lady upstairs.

"I had my own thoughts from the first," mused Mrs. Naylor, "and I do not think things are quite as they should be. Such a pity, too! for she is a nice lady, and fonder of a baby no one could be. Oh, dear, what a world it is, to be sure!"

Percy's discarded wife sat in the loneliness of her room with her own and thoughts for company. How the bright romance of her young life seemed to have died out—how the love-dream had faded. She went back to the simple traditions of her childhood, and this present misery seemed like a judgment on her for having deceived and disobeyed her parents.

She had done so in the purity and the depth of her love for Percy, and now he had turned away from her.

No change is so bitter to a woman as the change of the gentle, devoted lover to the stern and jealous unforgiving husband.

To Fanny it did not seem real that this hard, scornful man could be her Percy—the hero of her worship—the impersonation of her ideal. He seemed to have killed at a blow all the little tender memories, the moments of delicious, dreamy rapture over which she loved to ponder. He brought her down to the bare, cruel realities; talked of their love-tie as a fetter, and coldly made arrangements for a separation while she was burdened with the secret she had sworn to keep for his sake.

The girl knew her power. She could easily have met him on his own ground, avowed herself his wife, and made him show for what reason he proposed to put her aside for ever like one unworthy.

(To be continued.)

## AN ENDURING LOVE.

—3—

(Continued from page 273.)

She was dining at the Hall, to which Harry Moore had just returned from London, where he had been on a flying visit.

"Do you remember Frank Power?" he asked Ada, who was seated next to him, "and how surprised we all were at hearing his father possessed practically nothing? Now that is a genuine case of a blessing in disguise. You see the beggar was compelled to work in downright earnest, and the result has astonished those who knew what a butterfly he was. He is coming to the front rapidly, and competent judges assure me that he will be one of the leading writers of the century."

"I am very pleased to hear it," Ada replied, calmly, though she had great difficulty in concealing the pride which the information caused to swell in her bosom.

"Of course," he continued placidly, "Miss Stanhope's influence considerably simplified matters for him at the start; but still there is no doubt that he possesses genuine talent. By-the-way, Belle," raising his voice, "they say Gertrude is caught at last!"

His sister glanced across the table.

"Who is the lucky man?" she asked.

"Why none other than Frank Power. It is quite a romance; all London is full of it."

"But is it true, or merely a rumour?"

"Well, I don't know that she has accepted him, but there is no doubt that he is desperately in love with her; he follows her like a shadow."

Isabel cast a furtive look at Ada, and perceived that her face had grown suddenly pale, but beyond that she betrayed no sign, though the heedless words cost her a sleepless night.

"Could it be true?" she asked hurriedly when she was safely within her own room.

"Was it possible that this man, to whose memory she had been so faithful, had already forgotten her?"

She tried resolutely to banish the idea; but for the first time her faith had received a decided blow, and though the matter was not again alluded to she could not forget it.

Several weeks passed by uneventfully after this disagreeable incident, and once more she was dining at the Hall.

Luckily there were no guests besides herself, for it almost seemed as if a sportive Fate had singled this place out as a torture-chamber.

During the first part of the meal everything passed off pleasantly, when Harry, *apropos* of some remark from his sister, exclaimed,—

"Ah! I forgot to tell you, poor old Frank has received his *congé*. I met him yesterday; he looks awfully ill; I am afraid he takes his dismissal a great deal to heart."

"Pooh!" said Mr. Moore, "he will soon outlive that disappointment. You youngsters are always fancying yourselves in love with every fresh face you see."

"Bravo, dad; though I do not know for whom the cap is intended. But seriously, this was no passing fancy of Frank's, I can assure you. He looks so ill that I could scarcely recognise him at first."

Ada sat listening without remark; but after dinner she seated herself by Isabel in the drawing-room.

"Belle," she said, with assumed carelessness, "do you think Mr. Power has really proposed to this Miss Stanhope?"

Isabel was a shrewd, sensible girl, and so without hinting at any personal interest in the affair, she answered in a matter of fact way,—

"Yes, dear, the report is perfectly true, Gertrude mentioned it in her last letter, which came this morning. You have not met Gertrude I think. She is very beautiful you know, and rich and clever. I rather admire Master Frank's audacity. But as my brother remarked, it is unfortunately no passing fancy. Gertrude writes that he was very much in earnest, and she felt quite sorry for him."

"Ah!" exclaimed Ada, with a long drawn sigh and she made no further observation.

But Isabel looking at her friend's face needed no assurance that the love which she had been nourishing in her heart was dead, killed by a wounded pride.

Later in the evening, when Ada had returned to Ellerslie, Isabel sat down in order to write to her cousin.

"Dear Albert," the letter ran, "I am as yet unaware if the news of Frank's proposal and rejection has reached you. Harry mentioned the subject at dinner this evening in Ada's presence. Of course he was perfectly unconscious of the interest his information possessed for her, which from our point of view made it all the better. As it happened I received a letter from Gertrude this morning which enabled me to corroborate his statement. Ada made no remark, and I forbore to press her; but you may be absolutely certain that all danger of Frank's rivalry is at an end. I am so sure of this that I do not even counsel your immediate return. Her eyes now are effectually opened, and if you fall again the fault will be yours. Your affectionate cousin,—  
"BELLE."

When Ada sought her room that night it was with a feeling of anger rather than misery in her heart.

She had felt so sure that Frank loved her that to doubt his ultimate return had seemed like a breach of confidence, and now it was apparent that after his departure from Stapleville he had scarcely given her a passing thought.

That he was still free possessed no interest for her, as Isabel had perceived her love was dead.

In truth, her innocent affection had been centred upon an ideal Frank, a loyal-hearted, gallant lover, true and chivalrous and unselfish. By the news of that evening her ideal had been ruthlessly demolished; the golden idol at whose shrine she had worshipped proved to be but an image of clay, and she did not even weep.

She thought of this man with a mixture of pity and contempt. There were two standpoints from which his character might be viewed, and either filled her with a species of disgust.

His conduct might be traced either to fickleness or self-seeking; in either case it mattered little, since to her he was now as if he had never existed.

One little point troubled her, but it did not concern Frank.

"I wonder if Belle guessed the horrid secret," she murmured to herself; "how she would laugh if she knew the truth," and with this reflection she proceeded slowly to undress.

## CHAPTER IX.

As the days wore on Doctor Marriot rejoiced to see a great change for the better in his daughter's spirits.

She was no longer silent and distrustful, the old laughing light danced in her eyes; as of yore a merry smile hovered perpetually round the rosy lips, and the house re-echoed with the music of her joyous laugh.

He did not seek to know the reason for this change; it was sufficient that the cloud, whatever its nature, had been dissipated, leaving not a shadow behind.

Isabel Moore watched this new development with a keen sense of amusement, but like Ada's father she uttered no comment.

At the end of a fortnight, however, she despatched another brief note to her cousin, bidding him return at once.

"All is going on satisfactorily," she wrote; "but perhaps it would be as well now if you were here in person. Try and run down on receipt of this."

Albert read the letter in which this passage occurred, and prepared immediately to act upon its advice.

Knowing his cousin's shrewdness and that it was unlikely she had erred in estimating Ada's sentiments, he felt that the time had arrived when he could conscientiously lay aside his scruples.

It has somewhere been said that love is only a higher form of selfishness, but Albert's affection was of that kind which eliminates every thought of self. His one object was to ensure Ada's happi-

ness; to gain that he had proved himself ready to sacrifice his own hopes, and every prospect of joy which life held for him.

Now, however, the circumstances were changed; the barrier had been withdrawn, and he was free to win, if he could, that love for which his heart hungered.

At the station he placed his luggage in the dog-cart, and bade the man drive to the Hall.

"I will walk," he observed, "I shall enjoy the exercise."

He started gaily, walking on with the long tireless strides of the practised pedestrian. Near the town he caught sight of a graceful girlish figure and his heart bounded.

It was Ada Marriot returning home from a long ramble, and quickening his steps he speedily reached her side.

"Miss Marriot!" he exclaimed, and the girl, turning round, gave utterance to a little cry.

"You quite startled me," she observed softly; "I had no idea you were in Stapleville."

"I have just returned," he answered, and then they walked side by side in silence.

Presently, just where the road forked, Ada exclaimed,—

"Here is papa," and Dr. Marriot coming up greeted the young man warmly.

"Ah, Mr. Pottinger!" he said, "you are almost a stranger, I have seen nothing of you for a long time. When will you come and dine with us? Shall we say to-morrow?"

Albert looked at the girl, and she with a slight flush said,—

"We shall be very pleased to see you, if you have made no other engagement."

"There are very few engagements which would induce me to forego the pleasure of dining at Ellerslie," he remarked. "You may most certainly count on me, Mr. Marriot."

"That's right. Going on to the Hall? Give my respects to your folks. I have not seen much of them lately. By the way, that young friend of yours is forging ahead rapidly."

"Yes, Mr. Power is establishing himself as a very successful author."

He cast a swift glance at Ada, and perceived to his delight that she met his gaze without flinching.

"Belle was right," he muttered to himself, as raising his hat he turned back in the direction of the Hall, "she does not care for him any longer."

In the Hall grounds he met his cousin, who reproached him for having kept her waiting.

"Whatever induced you to walk?" she asked.

"A happy providence, my dear Belle, with the result that I am engaged to dine at Ellerslie to-morrow evening."

"You are making progress," she responded gaily; "but come now, or we shall be late; the first bell has rung, and as you see I have not even changed my dress."

"Lay the blame upon my shoulders," he said. "I shall not heed a scolding much," and Belle, looking at him, saw that his face shone with a happy smile.

Presenting himself the next evening at the earliest possible moment at Ellerslie, he found Ada in the drawing-room with her aunt.

With the latter he had always been a favourite, and now when in a few well-chosen words he expressed his pleasure at seeing her, she answered with almost a smile,—

"Indeed, sir, you should regard my presence as a distinct compliment; had it not been for your visit I should have retired long since to my own room."

"That's perfectly true, Albert," added Mr. Marriot, who entered the room in time to hear his sister's assertion, "so you must make yourself particularly agreeable. We shall expect you to relate all the doings of the gay world."

The young man laughed.

"I will do my best," he said, brightly, "but I forewarn you my talents as a raconteur are extremely limited."

However, in spite of this deprecatory speech it was mainly owing to the charm of his conversation that they passed an extremely pleasant evening, and even Aunt Hester felt sorry when the time came for him to leave.

"A nice, well-bred, well-mannered young

man," she said to her brother, "with none of the absurd pretensions which make the modern youth so disagreeable; I like him very much."

"Yes!" agreed the doctor, "a good-looking, sensible fellow. He will make some lucky girl an excellent husband one of these days! Ready for bed, Ada? Well, I suppose you must be tired; it is getting late;" and he kissed her fondly.

Aided by his cousin Albert played his game skilfully, and allowed several weeks to slip without making any allusion to his former passion.

"Give her time to grow accustomed to the new order of things," Belle suggested, "and meanwhile make yourself indispensable," a command which Albert cheerfully obeyed.

Scarcely a day passed without their meeting. Sometimes he dined at Ellerslie, where he was always sure of a hearty welcome, and very frequently Ada was at the Hall, where Belle successfully manoeuvred to throw them into each other's society.

At length the time came when he resolved to repeat his question. It was a beautiful moonlight night, and he was accompanying her on her way home from the Hall.

"Ada!" he exclaimed, suddenly, as they reached the private gate which fronted the high road, "do you remember the question I once asked you? May I ask it again? I have been very weary, darling; these last few months have amply proved how miserable my life must be without your love. Ada, will you be my wife? I have loved you always, dear, and my passion does not grow less. Can you not learn to love me a little? If you will but trust yourself to me I will devote my life to secure your happiness."

The beautiful face was bathed in a warm red glow.

"Hush!" the girl whispered, shyly, "you must not speak like that; I am not worthy of you. I have been very foolish. Once you offered me a chance of happiness, and I threw it away. I thought—"

Apparently her lover cared little to learn just then what was in her mind, for passing his arm round her waist he drew her gently towards him until the fair head lay on his shoulder.

"My darling," he cried, passionately, "my darling; tell me the truth. Tell me in words that which your eyes reveal. Say 'I love you!'"

"I love you," she whispered, "I love you!" and then their lips met in a long sweet kiss.

Presently, disengaging herself from his embrace, the girl said, softly,—

"It is late, my father will be waiting for me," and opening the gate they passed through.

Perhaps Dr. Marriot was not easily moved; at any rate he exhibited little surprise when the young man made his announcement, and asked for his sanction.

"Ah!" he said, pleasantly, "verily the ways of lovers are strange. First you steal my daughter away from me, and then request that I will secure you in possession of the booty. Well, my boy, honestly I am glad. Ada is a good girl, and I think I can safely trust her to your keeping."

"And you will not insist on a long engagement, sir?" the young man pleaded.

"No; Ada shall decide for herself. If I am to lose her it may be as well soon as late."

And so when the June roses were once again in bloom, and the smiling earth was decked in its fairy summer mantle, the bells of Stapleville Church rang out merrily on the morning air, and the building was densely packed with people who had come to gaze upon as fair a bride as our merry England could show.

And away in London, while Albert proudly led his blushing wife from the portal of the church, a man sat at a high desk absorbed in writing. He was still young and handsome, with a certain effeminate beauty; but his eyes were lustrous, his cheeks hollow, and the mark of suffering was on his brow.

In the years to come men will point to him as one of the greatest writers of the day, whose books fetch fabulous prices, who has made a name which will live maybe for centuries; but those who envy his fame would be stricken with silence could they but look upon his withered heart.

THE END.



## SOCIETY.

QUEEN LOUISE of Denmark has taken up her residence at the beautiful Chateau of Bernstorff.

THE present Queen of Italy became a bride when little more than sixteen years of age.

THE Queen has approved of her Extra Woman of the Bedchamber, the Hon. Ina Erskine M'Neill, being betrothed to the Duke of Argyll.

THE places of the grooms-in-waiting were formerly Ministerial, but now they are permanent posts, the salary being £390 a year, with never more than four weeks of annual attendance at Court.

It is stated that the Shabzada on returning home will pay a visit to Constantinople, in order to salute the Sultan, the Head of the Faithful, and that on his reaching home his Highness will be appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Amer's army.

PRINCESS FREDERICA of Hanover, who is staying with her mother, Queen Marie, at Kissingen, will return shortly to Hampton Court Palace, after an absence of nearly four years. Princess Frederica will reside at Hampton Court Palace for about three months, and is to visit the Queen at Windsor when the Court returns to the Castle from Balmoral.

THE Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse and the Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Roumania will visit the Queen at Windsor Castle. The Queen has lent the Crown Prince and Princess Albert Cottage (one of the residences in Osborne Park) as quarters for their two children during their stay in London.

PRINCESS FREDERICK CHARLES of Prussia is expected to pay a visit to her daughter, the Duchess of Connaught, at Bagshot Park, towards the end of the summer. It was hoped that her Royal Highness would arrive in time to spend the Duchess of Connaught's birthday in England (July 25th), but this could not be arranged.

THE Queen has given two portraits of herself to decorate the Victoria Ward of the Charing Cross Hospital. The most interesting of these two prints is the one that depicts Her Majesty, as a girl of fifteen, when Princess Victoria, her mother, the Duchess of Kent, being by her side. The other picture is of a later date, and in Royal robes.

It is now definitely settled that the Emperor William is to be the guest of Lord Londsdale at Lowther Castle in August, after his Majesty's visit to Cowes. The Emperor will leave Cowes on the evening of Saturday, August 10th, and he is to travel direct to Penrith by the South-Western, Great Western, and North-Western lines, and will arrive at Lowther early on Sunday morning. The Emperor is to have a day's grouse-shooting over Lord Londsdale's moors, and will visit Ulleswater, Derwentwater, and Whitehaven during his stay, which is to extend over five or six days. The Imperial yacht will proceed from Cowes to the Tyne, and the Emperor is to embark at Newcastle when he returns to Germany on August 16th or 17th; but it is just possible that he may pay a brief visit to Lord and Lady Londonderry at Wynyard Park in which case he will rejoin the Hohenzollerns at Seaham Harbour.

PRINCESS HELENA's bridal veil did not come from Chantilly, but from Caen. It is such lace as Marie Antoinette used to patronise for the trimming of her Trianon fichus and rustic handkerchiefs of muslin, which were all edged with this lace. It is a very lasting material, though it does not look coarse. The ground work is in open meadows, like the cane seat of a chair, and this will be sprigged over with the fleur-de-lys, while the arms of France and Italy will appear in the pattern of the veil. The thread is flaxen, spun only in Normandy, and the fabric washes well if not torn in the process. Perhaps its use at the Orleans d'Artois wedding will bring it into fashion. At present it is rarely seen save on the caps of Normandy peasants.

## STATISTICS.

EIGHTY-ONE thousand passengers, on an average, cross the English Channel every month.

THE Roman Catacombs are 580 miles in extent, and it is estimated that from 6,000,000 to 15,000,000 dead are there interred.

FIVE thousand three hundred and sixty-three white men, and 40,888 natives are employed in the 67 gold mines of the Randt Transvaal.

THE entire population of the globe is upwards of 1,400,000,000, of whom 35,214,000 die every year; 95,480 every day; 4,020 every hour; 67 every minute, and one and a fraction every second. On the other hand the births amount to 37,792,000 every year; 100,800 every day; 4,200 every hour; 70 every minute, and one and a fraction every second.

## GEMS.

ONE may live as a conqueror, a king or a magistrate, but he must die as a man.

THERE is a hardness about real dignity that never dreads contact and communion with others, however humble.

NO man or woman of the humblest sort can really be strong, pure and good, without the world being the better for it, without somebody being helped and comforted by the very existence of this goodness.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

POTATO SALAD.—Six cold boiled potatoes, two beets—cooked of course—two hard boiled eggs, and a few lettuce leaves. Arrange a border of lettuce leaves around your salad bowl or platter, and have the potatoes in long strips, the beets cut in cubes, and the eggs in slices; fill in the centre, and then pour over the dressing.

RHUBARB DESSERT.—Make a rich syrup by adding sugar to water in which long strips of orange peel have been boiled until tender; lay it into a single layer of pieces of rhubarb three inches long and stew gently until clear. When done remove and cook another layer. This makes a handsome dessert dish by ornamenting with puff paste cut in fancy shapes.

A VERY TOOTHsome PUDDING.—One pint of bread-crumbs, one quart of milk, one teaspoonful of white sugar, yolks of four eggs, grated rind of one lemon. Beat the eggs, sugar and lemon, then stir in the crumbs; bake until a nice brown. Beat to a stiff froth the whites of four eggs with four tablespoonfuls of sugar. Spread fruit-jelly or jam over the pudding, cover with the frosting and set in the oven to brown slightly. Serve cold.

HAM CUTLETS.—Boil half a pound of ham slowly for twenty minutes. When cold chop fine, add to it an equal quantity of bread crumbs, a dash of pepper, a tablespoonful of chopped parsley and stir in two whole eggs, beaten well. Form this mixture into little cutlets the shape of a tiny ham, dip them in egg, then in bread-crumbs, and fry in smoking hot fat. Dish each one on a piece of toast the shape of the cutlet, pour around cream sauce and serve.

NUT CAKE.—Cream half a cupful of butter with one of sugar. Add beaten yolks of two eggs, half a cupful of treacle, one teaspoonful of cinnamon, one half teaspoonful of grated nutmeg, and one teaspoonful of soda dissolved in half a cupful of strong coffee. Now add the beaten whites of the eggs, two cupfuls of sifted flour, half a pound of chopped nuts of any kind, one quarter of a pound of seeded and chopped raisins, and a few shreds of citron. Bake in a large cake and cut in slices.

We have still a few copies of No. 1,671, with which we presented the picture "THE NEW BABY" in stock, and shall be pleased to forward a copy on receipt of two penny stamps.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

ONE variety of india-rubber tree has leaves of the deepest green, each provided with a narrow border of very bright red.

To the moisture in the air we are indebted for the maintenance of an even degree of temperature. But for it night would be colder than Greenland, even at the Tropics. It is the water in the air that holds the sun's heat and keeps the earth warm where direct sunlight fails to fall upon bodies.

In proportion to its size the mouse is the most active of all vertebrate animals. It is from two and one-half to three inches long, with a tail about twice as long as the head and body. It has light forequarters, strong hindquarters, very long legs, and it can jump a very considerable height for its size.

WOODEN shoes in France are produced to the extent of about four million pairs yearly. They are made in Alsace and Barrier by machinery and Lozere by hand. In the last named province seventeen hundred persons are engaged in this manufacture, and the yearly product is more than half a million pairs. The best are made of maple; in the provinces nearly every lady possesses a pair of the finer sabots for wearing out in damp weather. These finer sabots have monograms and other designs carved on the vamp, and they are kept on the foot by ornamental leather pieces over the instep. The manufacture of these pieces of leather is a regular business in France.

MANY animals are able to see objects behind them as well as those in front, and that, too, without turning round. The common hare or rabbit has this power in a marked degree. Its eyes are large, prominent and placed on the side of the head. The deer is another example of an animal of this class. The power of rabbits and deer to see things in the rear is very noticeable in greyhound coursing, for, though that species of dog is mute while on the chase, the rabbit is able to judge to a nicety the exact moment which will be best for "doubling" on the trail. The deer, too, can run at a high speed and tell just exactly when to increase its gait to full speed without once turning to measure the distance between itself and the mute pursuer.

THE ostrich is first plucked when about seven months old, and every seven months after that. The valuable feathers are found on the wings and tail. The third plucking is usually very good, and about fifty pounds is usually realised from each bird at a plucking. If the feather is not "ripe" when plucking time comes it is cut off with shears. A ripe quill stem drops out of its own accord. When the proper time has come to pluck an ostrich he is cajoled by means of an orange or other tit-bit until he is headed for a small, boxlike inclosure, just large enough to hold him; a man slips in behind him, and with a sudden rush, shoves him into the pen and clasps the door shut. Here the bird has no room to kick, and is at the mercy of the shearers. Ostriches cannot get over or under a railing four feet high. This is, therefore, all the fence necessary to keep them confined.

To a certain degree the inhabitants of all Mohammedan countries are worshippers of the tree known as the date palm. One of the prophet's supreme and most binding injunctions is "Honour thy paternal aunt, the date palm, for in Paradise was it created, and out of the very heap of dust from which Adam's body was formed." The Mohammedans also have a tradition to the effect that when Adam and Eve were driven from the garden they were allowed to take with them a date seed, and that from that single seed sprang all the date trees now known. By some admirable providence the original date seed was planted and the tree grew where the temple of Mecca now stands, and from its trunk was made the cradle which often lulled the infant Mahomet to sleep. The Mohammedans declare that all prayers are fulfilled which are made with the knees pressing upon the palm wood, or with the same kind of wood in the hand.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**S. B.**—There are several of about the same size.  
**W. A.**—It all depends on the quality of the liquor.  
**CURSEAN.**—The 26th of May, 1896, was on a Thursday.  
**ROVER.**—We regret that we cannot give you any help.  
**LANDLORD.**—Not unless the tenant previously agreed.  
**ANXIOUS.**—He cannot be compelled to give you a character.

**H. B.**—Stone throwing in the public streets is contrary to law.

**COO.**—All candidates for the Civil Service must pass an examination.

**RUBY.**—Perhaps if you greased the bowl it would answer better.

**BARCEL.**—Thoroughbred dogs are said to be less intelligent than mongrels.

**LANCELOT.**—We strongly advise you to submit all the documents to a solicitor.

**SEDL.**—Take them to one of the costumiers or to some second-hand dealer.

**EXCELLENCE.**—You must just enlist in the Royal Engineers and rise by merit.

**OLD READER.**—Wages of any amount, no matter how small, can be arrested for taxes.

**V. K.**—Impossible to prescribe without knowing the cause. Take the animal to a vet.

**INQUIRE.**—Indiarubber soled shoes 'are decidedly doubtful if worn for any length of time.

**DOUBTFUL ONE.**—The courtship has lasted too long, and is ought to be brought to a close at once.

**ANXIOUS.**—Cold cream can be purchased from any chemist. Try it for what you complain of.

**QUEST.**—The Lieutenant would not be allowed to wear private clothes and a tall hat habitually.

**M. N.**—Duties were levied on bricks in Great Britain down to 1850, when they were finally repealed.

**EMERSON.**—Nothing can be done but dye them; it must be damp or mildew that has spotted them.

**ARMONY.**—The most likely place to find a purchaser would be near the docks. Only sailors buy them.

**TRAVELLER.**—The most frequent cause of redness of the nose and unpleasant pallor in women is tight-lacing.

**JESSICA.**—Where there are bird cages to be got into no amount of traps will help you to get rid of the mice.

**M. C. O.**—Only the surgeon, who can examine you personally, is in a position to say what is likely to cure you.

**G. G.**—The Royal Scots are the oldest regiment in the British service, and possibly also the oldest in the world.

**JANEY.**—It must have been kept in a place unsuited to it. There is nothing we can suggest to prevent the cracking.

**WEE WIFE.**—We can give you nothing easier to polish than what you can buy in the shops quite as cheaply as you could make it.

**DORCEL.**—It should, when mixed, be put in a papered tin and baked slowly in a cool oven for four, six, or eight hours, according to size.

**CHARLIE.**—Gymnastics, strict attention to the rules of health, and thorough but not too frequent baths, will be the best course to pursue.

**COURTESY MODE.**—The parody can be grown black, white, and all intermediate shades, the only deficiency being in the scarlet and allied hues.

**IN WANT OF ADVICE.**—There is no public institution suited to your requirements. Perhaps the clergyman of your parish may know of a private one.

**PROPERTY.**—If your cousin is willing or anxious to send books and music to you there seems to be no good reason why you should not allow him to do so.

**HANNAH.**—Put two tablespoons of sugar into a pan and allow it to melt, and then get as dark brown as treacle; then pour in half a pint of water and let it boil.

**M. V.**—To open an account in the Bank of England a person must deposit not less than £500, and the authorities require the depositor to be introduced by a customer.

**DULCIE.**—Iron the satin dress face down on the ironing sheet, with a cloth between iron and dress, and iron no more than moderately hot, or satin may be browned.

**RIP VAN WINKLE.**—It is one thing to have the conviction of his guilt in your mind and another thing to bring it home to him sufficiently clearly to convince a law court.

**LETTIE.**—Green peas may be preserved by immersing them in a half-sieve in hard boiling water, in which alum has been put, then bottling them and corking them closely.

**IGNORAMUS.**—Either spelling is correct—dreamed or dreamt. The latter word is pronounced as though spelled dreamt. Dryden says, "And dreamt the future fight." The Bible, in Genesis, says, "And Joseph dreamed a dream."

**CONSTANT READER.**—Send twopenny in stamps to Government Stationers' Information Office, 31, Broadway, London, E.W., for Canada and West Australia Handbooks.

**L. R.**—All parties in the House of Commons are Her Majesty's servants; those in power, her Government, and those out of power, her Opposition, both working for her as for the country's good.

**GIVEN.**—Damp the mildewed spots and rub on powdered oxalic acid, lay out to bleach for some hours, wash, and, if necessary, renew the acid and bleaching as usual if the mildew is difficult to remove.

**B. F.**—There are powder dyes that may be used for this purpose. Soak the wood in weak soda water for several hours, and then dip in the dye, prepared according to the directions on the package.

**LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."**—One way is to keep several books between the knees when sitting and lying in bed; but it is better to use a short double-arm'd crutch when sitting, and in a recumbent posture.

**ALFRED.**—It depends entirely upon your natural capability in the matter. Some people learn very quickly, others progress but slowly, and there are some persons who never seem to get the correct handling and who never do first-class work.

## GARLAND THE GRAVES OF THE BRAVE.

Wend us a lily wreath lovely and pale,  
 Bring forth white snowdrops, that bloom in the vale,  
 Gather pure daisies, they sprinkle the ground,  
 Humbly they grow, yet in plenty are found,  
 White lilacs, syringas, fair blossoms of spring,  
 Strew over dead soldiers—a love offering.

Here lies a brigadier who went to the war,  
 Young, gallant, and true, a faithful leader.  
 In the thickest of battles, in firmness and might,  
 His tall form was seen, but he fell in the fight;  
 His poor wife soon followed, she sleeps by his side,  
 So scatter sweet flowers o'er the trooper and bride.

Yonder a green mound is lying alone,  
 Nothing to mark it in shape of a stone;  
 Yet it is watered with tears from fond eyes,  
 A poor widowed mother knows just where it lies;  
 Forget not, this day, as in haste you pass by,  
 To scatter sweet flowers where the humble brave lie.

This is the tomb of an officer grand,  
 His the true heart to be placed in command;  
 Leaving his riches and home for the strife,  
 Fighting for freedom, so yielding his life,  
 Sleeping, while those whom he struggled to save  
 Hang wreaths on his tomb and strew buds o'er his grave.

Under those daisies lies poor little BILL,  
 Shot while on duty—drum silent and still!  
 Rough soldiers loved him, they wept when he fell,  
 Brave little heart! they remember him well.  
 Then bring forth bright blossoms, sweet emblems of joy,  
 To strew o'er the grave of the dead drummer boy.

Gather in clusters these children of spring,  
 Tokens of peace on each green grave we fling;  
 While as a motto let these few words be,  
 "Our Country! God keep it the land of the free!  
 Should foes rise again, may as brave men be found  
 To fight its good cause as those now in the ground."

Beautiful custom! Oh, long may it reign!  
 Long strew bright buds over brave soldiers slain!  
 Let bold martial music be heard where they lie,  
 Let their deeds be recalled every May till we die,  
 Let the young and the old come with reverent head,  
 To garland with flowers the graves of our dead.

J. W. S.

**W. H. P.**—The House of Lords at present is made up of five Princes of the Blood Royal, 28 archbishops and bishops, 482 peers of England, Great Britain, and the United Kingdom, 16 Representative Scottish and 28 Representative Irish Peers; in all 567 members.

**S. P.**—You are wise to desire to learn something about the place before going there. There is undoubtedly a good deal of published matter on the resources of the country, and by getting two or three papers you can put yourself in the way to obtain precisely the facts you most need.

**BETTY.**—Cats sometimes lose their fur from disease. If it comes off on account of what is called mange, get some sulphur and lard, mix them thoroughly and apply; or, what is much better, get equal parts of sulphurous acid and glycerine and rub the surface with this mixture. Do not handle the cat much.

**MARTY.**—TO INDIGESTION.—Obviously your indigestion is largely a result of want of fresh-air exercise; the best substitute for that is the back-sponging to waist night and morning, and following with vigorous rub with rough towel; they do not persist in eating food that does not digest; you have a wide selection in spring time especially.

**MARY.**—Put one tablespoonful of oatmeal in a basin and moisten it with cold water; then pour over it two breakfast cups of boiling water, stir well and stir again; then let it settle for five or ten minutes; pour off all the liquid into a pan, leaving the coarse part of the meal in the basin; boil this for ten or fifteen minutes to taste; add salt to season, and serve.

**SOFTENER.**—There is no permanent cure for corns; that is to say, there are individuals so constituted that they seem to develop corns under all conceivable circumstances; of course among the cures you have tried would be easy-fitting boots, and avoiding the use of them for any longer period than your work required, cool, soft slippers being substituted at all convenient times.

**BARBER.**—The barbers were originally surgeons at a time when bleeding was resorted to very freely; the sign now shown in front of the barber's shop represents the basin used to catch the blood, the basin with which the lancet was struck into the vein, and the spiral tape with which the wound was bound up when sufficient of the life fluid had been drawn from the unlucky subject.

**P. J.**—As a rule it is wise for a young man to find out beforehand if his society is desirable. In some circles young men do not call without being invited by some of the older members of the family. 3. On leaving any public place it is better form for a lady to go first. In most places the passageways are sufficiently wide for them to go side by side, which is the best thing to do if possible.

**JENN.**—Steep the curtains overnight in cold water containing a good shake of soap powder to take the scum out of them; next day boil the curtains with a bit of soap and more powder; wring out carefully; now have a bowlful of hot-water starch made up, and put this into the cold water in which the curtains are finally rinsed; hang up to dry, and when crisp to the hand send them to be mangled.

**GARDENER.**—Water all plants that require it in the morning; leave no water in the saucer of any plant after the whole has become saturated through; never water by dribs, but give the whole a good soaking, or the result often is that the top of the mould is wetted, while the lower, containing the roots, is dust. Sponge over the foliage as often as it becomes dusty, for plants need to breathe as much as we do.

**PHILIP.**—You had better write to Secretary, Civil Service Commission, Cannon-row, Westminster, S.W., asking him to be good enough to send you list of subjects set for candidates for assistant clerkships in navy; it is rather long for us to reproduce here; age of candidates is from sixteen to eighteen years; French is a compulsory subject, but candidates may, if they like, also offer German, Latin, mathematics, and some scientific subjects.

**POLEY.**—Straw hats are bleached by wetting them thoroughly, then putting them in a close box in which sulphur is burned. It takes some time to bleach them, but the process is successful if one has patience and takes pains. It is not easy to learn millinery or any other business without a teacher, but one may learn much by going to places where fine millinery is shown and studying carefully the way materials and trimmings are used.

**HELEN.**—If too large, cut them after peeling them and trimming the stalks. Throw them for a few minutes into boiling water, then drain and put them into cold water to whiten. Dry well and saute in hot butter for three minutes. Then add, when almost done, a teaspoonful of flour and some chopped parsley. Stir, and in three minutes add a cupful of boiling broth. Let it simmer very gently for about ten minutes. Add lemon juice, salt and pepper. Remove from the fire and stir in the yolk of an egg beaten up with a few drops of cold water or two teaspoonfuls of sherry. Fill shells with this mixture, cover the top with bread crumbs, dot with butter, set in the oven until thoroughly hot, and serve.

**WILLIAM TELL.**—The use of the bow may be traced to the remotest antiquity. The first notice which we find of it is in Genesis (xli. 20), where it is said Ishmael became an archer. It was introduced into England in the reign of Egbert the Saxon, but was not used as a martial weapon until the reign of Edward I. The period at which the long bow attained its meridian fame may be fixed in the reign of Henry V., whose archers destroyed the whole French cavalry, clothed in complete steel, with their yard-long arrows. At the battle of Flodden Field also the English archers made sad havoc. Shooting with the bow was an extremely fashionable amusement in the reign of Henry VIII., and Holinshed reports that the prince shot as well as any of his guard. After the siege of Devizes, in the civil war, 1645, the bow, as a military weapon, was entirely laid aside. Archery derives its name from the bow being, when drawn, in the shape of an arch.

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